

**MASTER'S RESEARCH PAPER**

**AN EXPLORATION OF CRITICAL DISCOURSE:**

**THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR DEBATE**

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**ABSTRACT:**

On December 14 2005 Iranian President Mahmoud Ahamadinejad declared to audiences around the world that “Israel should be wiped off the map” and that the world must bring an end to its “Zionist regime”. Since this virulent utterance of hate, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has responded with an equally benevolent discourse on the emergence of Iran’s nuclear program, and has coopted innumerable Security Experts, both from within and outside of Israel’s Security-Intelligence apparatus, to construct an extensive community of Dominant actors around the need to confront the greatest “existential threat” facing both “State of Israel and the rest of the world”. The response within Israeli civil society has defied past junctures in both its immediate and distant past, in the simultaneous emergence of a community of Dissenting actors which have looked to contest and resist the Prime Minister’s qualification of Iran as the most pressing existential threat facing the Jewish nation to date. This Master’s Research Paper analyzes both discourses between the dates of January 2011-November 2012 to reveal the role of discourse and framing within the “unprecedented” level of public debate and contestation that has ensued, concerning an issue intimately related to Israel’s security. It puts forth the argument supported by the theoretical precepts of Critical Security Studies that what is being witnessed within the “Iranian nuclear debate” renders a prime example of the “shifting of an issue” out of the realm of exception, unease and emergency, and into the realm of normal political dialogue.

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## SECTION 1: THE IRANIAN THREAT AND THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR DEBATE

Despite the presence of a vast body of Western-based literature examining Iran's emerging nuclear power in the region and the potential threat it poses to America's lone ally in the region, Israel, there is a significant dearth of studies exploring the opinions expressed within Israel's civil society and media outlets on what a nuclear-Iran means for its existence<sup>1</sup>. This analysis proposes to meet this gap by setting forth a methodology that recognizes the questioning of Iranian nuclear capability by multiple actors and audiences in Israeli civil society, as a unique instance of public debate and "political spectacle"<sup>2</sup>.

Central to this methodology is the suggestion that despite Israel's "vibrant civil society" and strong democratic politic<sup>3</sup>, when it comes to issues of security, the Iranian issue has defied past patterns of becoming "enclosed" within the realms of security and emergency-style decision making by a select political elite<sup>4</sup>. This feature of the debate, in terms of its encompassing actors, civil society institutions, and opinions which lack the "epistemic authority" classically granted to the security and military echelons of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) or the Ministry of Defense, is particularly identifiable in the years 2011 and 2012. It is within this time period that the media, members of the current political leadership, as well as, former heads of Israeli security institutions- such as the Shin Bet and

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<sup>1</sup> For Realist studies of the Iranian nuclear program and its emergence relative to other Western nuclear powers, such as the United States, with minor mention of Israel see: Pollack, Kenneth (2004), "The Persian Puzzle : The Conflict Between Iran and America". New York : Random House, Miller, Steven. "Proliferation Gamesmanship: Iran and the Politics of Nuclear Confrontation". *The Syracuse Law Review* 57.3 (2007): 551-601. Einhorn, Robert. "A Transatlantic Strategy on Iran's Nuclear Program". *The Washington Quarterly* 27.4 (Autumn 2004): 1-91; Izadi, Foad, & Hakimeh, Saghaye-Biria. "A discourse analysis of elite American newspaper editorials: The case of Iran's nuclear program." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 31.2 (2007): 140-165. Siegel, Jonas & Barforoush, Saranaz "Media Coverage of Iran's Nuclear Program". *CISSM Report* (April 2013): 1-35.

<sup>2</sup> Huysmans, Jef. *The politics of insecurity: Fear, migration and asylum in the EU*. Routledge, 2006. 60-63

<sup>3</sup> Freilich, Charles D. "Striking Iran: The Debate in Israel". *Survival*. 54.6 (2012): 93-106.

<sup>4</sup> The argument that Iran's nuclear program has garnered intensified political debate within Israel and that such debate has defied past patterns of security decision-making, has been discussed by numerous academics from Israeli Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), such as : Ben Meir, Yehuda. "The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran". *INSS* (2013): 231-44 & Feldman et al. "What to Do about Nuclearizing Iran? The Israeli Debate". *Crown Center for Middle East Studies*. 59 (Feb 2012): 1-8.

Mossad - became central participants in contesting whether Iran truly constitutes the greatest existential threat facing Israel today. Similarly, the question of whether Iran's status as a belligerent nuclear power, and its virulent rhetoric towards the existence of a Jewish nation, necessitates the language of emergency and exception attributed to it by Netanyahu administration, rather than that of extended deliberation and long-term political debate.

According to a number of Israeli academics, such as Yehuda Ben Meir, Shlomo Brom, Shimon Stein, Shai Feldman and Charles D. Frielich, the "unprecedented level" of debate around this issue is a vivid illustration of the strength of Israeli civil society and its pragmatic desire to question the very "characterization of the Iranian threat" as indefinitely "existential"<sup>5</sup>. This social and political characteristic of the debate makes it unique in its ability to defy the classic institutional and political parameters of public debate traditionally attributed to issues of security in Israel, which have been characterized by "two-person cabinets", "insulated decision-making", and centrally driven by the ideology and vision of the Prime Minister & Defense Minister of the time.<sup>6</sup>

Another striking feature of this debate lies in how such a questioning and re-positioning of the Iranian nuclear issue within the realm of popular media has taken place, in terms of the role of language and discourse in establishing both dominant and dissenting camps of political actors. By adopting a Critical Security Studies (CSS) approach, this analysis emphasizes the role of a dominant discourse, shaped by the administration of PM Binyamin Netanyahu in response to Iranian PM Mahmoud Ahmedinajad's utterance of a threat in early 2007 to "wipe Israel off the map", and clear its presence "from the pages of history".<sup>7</sup> Netanyahu has constructed a robust narrative ripe with unique and powerful

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<sup>5</sup> Ben Meir, Yehuda. "The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran". *INSS* (2013): 232

<sup>6</sup> Freilich, Charles D. "Striking Iran: The Debate in Israel". *Survival*. 54.6 (2012):.95

<sup>7</sup> Weiner, J. R. "Referral of Iranian president Ahmadinejad on the charge of incitement to commit Genocide". , *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs* (2006) : 1

symbols, such as the “window of opportunity”, the “zone of immunity”, the infamous ACME bomb chart drawn at the UN General Assembly in September 2012, and his most recent indictment at the UN General Assembly in September 2013 that the new Iranian President Rouhani is a “wolf dressed in sheep’s clothing”<sup>8</sup>. These symbols have not only shaped a dominant discourse, but have further contributed to the creation of a political community and strong counter-discourse, which starkly departs from past debates surrounding nuclear threats facing Israel, such as the June 1982 decision to bomb Iraq’s Osirak reactor and the September 2007 bombing of the Dir Al Azur reactor in Syria<sup>9</sup>. These dynamics mirror key features in the process of desecuritization, defined as “the shifting [of] an issue out of the realm of securitization and emergency politics and into the realm of normal political or technical debate”<sup>10</sup>.

#### **THE CHALLENGES IN INVESTIGATING DOMINANT AND DISSIDENT DISCOURSES**

This study investigates the dominant online newspaper publications within Israeli civil society (Ha’aretz/Jerusalem Post/ Ma’ariv/Y-net News/ Yedioth Achronoth), and analyzes their role in shaping, as well as, reinforcing the presence of a dominant political discourse termed the *Iranian threat discourse*<sup>11</sup>. An analysis of the ideas and opinions from media sources from January 2011- November 2012 reveals the presence of a newly emerging counter-discourse within Israeli civil society which challenges the attempt of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s labor-led government to securitize the issue of Iran’s nuclear program. This study proposes to explore the process of a contested or incomplete securitization and investigate the important dialogue between the two respective

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<sup>8</sup>Belz, Emily. “Netanyahu: Soothing rhetoric doesn’t erase Iran’s ‘savage record’ ”. WorldMag. ,30/10/2013. Web

<sup>9</sup> Ben Meir, Yehuda. “The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran”. *INSS* (2013): 232

<sup>10</sup> Hansen, Lene. “Reconstructing Desecuritization : The Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School & Directions on How to Apply it”. , *Review of International Studies* 38.3 (2012): 526

<sup>11</sup> The term *Iranian threat discourse* was adopted by myself, as well as Senior Fellow & distinguished diplomat at the University of Ottawa Ferry de Kerckhove in gathering and defining the dominant discourse espoused by the Netanyahu administration during the years of this analysis.

communities, termed *dominant* and *dissident*, which primarily challenge the norm of mainly security expert and military-driven decision-making on all matters of security in Israel.

## **EXPLORING THE POWER OF IDEA AND LANGUAGE: THE CASE OF THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR THREAT**

This study offers an innovative exploration into the power of framing and language and starts with the two premises emphasized by Alex Wendt in his explanation of “critical International Relations theory”. Wendt argues that “the fundamental structures of international politics are social rather than strictly material” (a claim that opposes materialism), and that “these structures shape actors identities and interests, rather than just their behavior...”<sup>12</sup>. Discourse is thus a powerful analytical tool, because of its ability to generate new social identities and structures, through appealing to issues within the realm of being ‘safe’ or ‘free’ from existential threats<sup>13</sup>

More important than any other linguistic concept within CSS is the concept of performing discourse, theoretically termed a “speech act”<sup>14</sup>. CSS architects Ole Waever and Barry Buzan develop this concept in their “Security: A New Framework for Analysis”, which emphasizes what is accomplished by uttering the word “security”. For instance, they argue that “by uttering ‘security’ a state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it”<sup>15</sup>. For Waever and Buzan the point was that the innocuous speaking of “the word *security* itself is the act”, and that by taking part in this “self-referential practice” of naming something an issue of security “...it takes on the shape and logic implied in issues of

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<sup>12</sup> Wendt, Alexander. “Constructing International Politics”. *International Security*, 20. 1 (1995):71-81

<sup>13</sup> Balzacq, Thierry. “Constructivism and Securitization Studies”. in Cavelti, M.D. & Mauer, V. *The Routledge Handbook of Security Studies*. (London: Routledge, 2012) : 58

<sup>14</sup> Huysmans, Jef. "What's in an act? On security speech acts and little security nothings." *Security Dialogue* 42.4-5 (2011): 372

<sup>15</sup> Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & De Wilde, J. *Security: a new framework for analysis*. (London : Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 27

security<sup>16</sup>”. Understanding the process of securitizing an issue, implied within the use of speech acts and placing an issue within the realm of exception and emergency, holds an amazing amount of explanatory power concerning how human beings both conceptualize and imagine threats or insecurity. The current case study provides a clear demonstration of how discourse was utilized by a set of political actors, which were able to relinquish a specific form of ideological and epistemic authority to generate new social structures within this paradigm.

Within these structures, Iran could only be imagined within existentially threatening boundaries of enmity, exclusion, threat and emergency. It is therefore held at the center of the findings produced within this analysis that this case study exemplifies not only how discourse is created or performed, but how the deconstruction of discursive strategies and behaviors can prospectively lead to either the replacement or reconstitution of an issue in non-existential terms<sup>17</sup>.

Providing the theoretical basis for this claim is Wendt alongside many Critical IR theorists such as Karl Deutsch, Martha Finnemore, Michael Barnett, David Campbell, and Lesley Mitzen, whom acknowledge the centrality of identity and social structures in “transforming” the relations between two nations or peoples<sup>18</sup>. Central to this analysis is this prescription, which Critical Social Constructivist IR theory holds for undoing or drastically modifying the “shared understandings, expectations, or knowledge” which are inter-subjectively determined and bound up within certain social structures, such as “security communities”<sup>19</sup>. These communities and their influence within contesting the nature of the

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<sup>16</sup>Taureck,Rita. “Securitization theory – The Story so far: Theoretical inheritance and What it Means to be a Post-Structural Realist”. *University of Tartu: CEEISA Convention* (2006) :8

<sup>17</sup>Aradau, Claudia. “Security and the Democratic Scene: Desecuritization and Emancipation”. *Journal of International Relations and Development*,7(2004):390

<sup>18</sup>Bueger, Christian.“Expertise on the Sites of Security: A Reflexive Practice” *European University Institute* (2006) : 2

<sup>19</sup>Balzacq, T. .“Constructivism and Securitization Studies,” : 61

Iranian existential threat in the form of Dominant or Dissenting terms is central within this analysis's focus on the role of discourse on the shape of the Iranian nuclear debate.

### **The features of a Security Community**

The concept of a Security community as a specific type of social structure, was first analyzed by Karl Deutsch in his 1957 study. Deutsch defined these communities within the international system more broadly as "...group[s] of states that had become integrated to the point at which there is 'real assurance that the members of that community will not fight each other physically, but will settle their disputes'<sup>20</sup>". When we reduce this concept through the work of Didier Bigo, Jef Huysmans, and Christina Boswell to a more micro intra-state level of analysis, there emerges a great potential for applying the concept of a community of "security experts", defined as "epistemic actors" able to generate a specific type of "expert knowledge", to the case study chosen.<sup>21</sup> The concept of insular communities with security expertise are explored at length by these three Critical theorists in examining the reliance and utilization of expert knowledge in cases such as European transnational security communities and regimes on immigration.

### **Security communities on the Iranian nuclear threat in Israel**

The conclusions emerging from these authors reflect the symbolic role of experts as the epistemic authorities which "derive legitimacy and authority" from their ability to produce "expert knowledge" and successfully occupy a certain social space "in which insecurity knowledge is produced"<sup>22</sup>. Within these spaces security experts are able to for example, cast migrants in existentially threatening "security terms" instead of more positive and less alarmist "economic terms". The case study chosen reflects how the Netanyahu administration strategically crafted a set of social structures and supporting discourse that

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<sup>20</sup>Balzacq, T. "Constructivism and Securitization Studies", 61.

<sup>21</sup>Bueger, Christian. "Expertise on the Sites of Security: A Reflexive Practice". *European University Institute* (2006) : 2.

<sup>22</sup>Bueger, C. "Expertise on the Sites of Security: A Reflexive Practice," 2.

empowered specific forms of expertise, mainly “security expertise”, and specific social space, while directly excluding other forms of knowledge and “knowledge producing actors”<sup>23</sup>. These actors are analyzed in the Findings Section and a discussion of why these actors were able to occupy a central role within the debate in their contributions towards legitimizing both the claims of dominant and dissenting political groupings and perspectives.

#### ANALYTICAL CONTRIBUTION

This paper makes some important contributions to two different bodies of scholarship. First, the case study’s focus on the dominant and dissident discourses on the Iranian nuclear threat constitutes some substantial contributions to the field of Critical Security Studies. This analysis sheds light on what the *process* of securitization means in the context of the case study of Iranian nuclear debate in Israel<sup>24</sup>. This contribution entails examining Israel as somewhat of a unique case in that security occupies a distinctly central place within Israeli processes of political and military decision-making, as a result of its tumultuous history of dormant wars, and Consistent Existential Threats (CETs).<sup>25</sup> Establishing this context is central to the conclusion derived by this analysis in terms of the ability of a set of political actors and more specifically political communities, to contest and challenge the invocation of securitized and emergency style logics, as those of best fit or necessity.

In addition, this analysis contributes to the field of Critical Security Studies by attempting to qualify a practical example of the processes of Desecuritization. The substance of this contribution rests on re-articulating securitization and its conceptual binary of desecuritization as “iterative political processes” which are best defined by the

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<sup>23</sup>Bueger, C. . “Expertise on the Sites of Security: A Reflexive Practice”, 4.

<sup>24</sup>This analysis is heavily based on a definition of securitization rendered in the work of Critical Security Studies author Dr. Mark B. Salter and his work. “Securitization and Desecuritization : a Dramaturgical Analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Authority”. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 11 (2008) : 322.

<sup>25</sup>Waever, Ole. “What Exactly Makes a Continuous Existential Threat Existential – And How is It Discountinued” in Barak, Oren & Sheffer, Gabriel (2009) *Existential Threats and Civil Security Relations*. Rowman & Littlefield : Plymouth : 22.

“complex interplay” of multiple speakers and audiences, as well as, moments of acceptance or rejection by multiple audiences<sup>26</sup>. This analysis calls into question the extent to which discourse and securitization can be solely imagined within the limited lenses of a single audience or “instantaneous moments”<sup>27</sup> of acceptance or rejection. Instead this work proposes the need to re-imagine these processes as more fluid, and ripe with moments of acceptance, contestation, challenge, and even rejection.

The second contribution addresses the field of public policy in providing a coherent and relevant case study that demonstrates the extent to which foreign policy decisions can be challenged by a larger body of actors than those conventionally assessed within the domains of the political elite or ruling government. In this way, the concepts of authority within framing, agenda-setting, and eventually the shaping of policy outcomes, are both re-cast and questioned as important areas meriting increased analysis. Furthermore the field of critical discourse theory, as informed by Van Dijk’s work on discursive manipulation and the “ideological square”, is central to this analysis and provides the theoretical basis on which to build the argument that the Netanyahu administration’s projection of a dominant Israeli ‘Self’ has been contingent on its establishment of an existentially threatening Iranian ‘Other’<sup>28</sup>. This analysis demonstrates and further looks to emphasize the importance of adopting a more extensive and systematic focus on language and political power in public policy studies.

## OUTLINE

Section 1 develops the theoretical significance, as well as, the relevance of analyzing this debate, as an instance, which both reinforces and challenges concepts within the bases of Critical Security Studies & Critical Discourse Analysis.

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<sup>26</sup> Salter, Mark B. “Securitization and Desecuritization”. *Journal of International Relations and Development*. 11 (2008): 324.

<sup>27</sup> Salter, Mark B. “Securitization and Desecuritization,”: 335.

<sup>28</sup> Van Dijk, T.A. “Discourse and Manipulation”, *Discourse & Society*. 17.3 (2006a): 360.

Section 2 conceptualizes the methodological shape of this analysis, qualifies its focus on five of Israel's most widely read online publications<sup>29</sup>, and puts forth a specific categorization of the data selected. This section further discusses the how the data selected for this MRP was triangulated using mixed method triangulation and linguistic analysis.

Section 3 addresses the literature on Israel's shifting relationship with Iran, the presence of public debate within past instances where Israel's existence is threatened by a rival nuclear power bent on its destruction, and further looks to locate the uniqueness of this debate within Israel's recent past.

Section 4 reviews and applies the Critical Security Studies concepts and research methods implored within this analysis, with a directed focus on the uniqueness of this case study, as one which is bound up with clear examples of the processes of securitization and desecuritization. This section looks to demonstrate how the case study of the Iranian nuclear debate both exemplifies and challenges the definition of these concepts within the Critical Security Studies approach to discourse analysis.

Section 5 sets forth the main findings of this study, and further proposes how they demonstrate instances of "securitizing moves" and "speech acts". Van Dijk's concept of "discursive manipulation" is analyzed in relation to the data set selected and the Critical Security Studies focus on Security experts and political communities is further qualified in relation to the actors present within dominant and dissenting camps identified within this study.

The final section of this MRP validates several conclusions emerging from the data set selected by reviewing the relevance of this debate in the general context of Critical Discourse Analysis and its focus on the importance of language and framing.

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<sup>29</sup> Klein, A. "Characterizing 'the Enemy': Zionism and Islamism in the Iranian and Israeli Press". , *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2 (2009): 389

## SECTION 2: METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN INVESTIGATING DISCOURSES

Analyzing the varying statements issued by the medias and political administrations within Israeli civil society through the Critical IR and Security Studies approach emphasizes some immense prescriptions for transforming the discursive symbols, and ideas projected within the dominant Iranian threat discourse in Israel. Combining these two theoretical perspectives thus offers a comprehensive methodological foundation upon which to more efficiently categorize and discern between the varying types of political and public statements being analyzed. This formulation is be complimented by the use of data retrieved from Israeli newspapers that takes the forms of interviews, news publications, editorials, op-eds and supplementary online news resources. The use of varying forms of primary and secondary sources substantiates the conclusions drawn within this work by providing for a mixed-method approach to triangulating the data selected.

### ANALYTICAL TRIANGULATION

The mixed methods triangulation approach utilized within this analysis specifically draws on three main types of sources.<sup>30</sup> The reason for making use of this style of triangulation is to be able to firstly analyze the mainstream media opinions, as well as, political statements made by the Netanyahu and Ahmedinajad political administrations without being overburdened by theoretical or contextual features, such as the frequent use of the holocaust, or references to Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. This is important because of the complexity of distinguishing between popular discourse and political rhetoric, and additionally because of the need to be efficient in analyzing hundreds of media entries within a two-year timeline. Furthermore the use of quantitative triangulation will be

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<sup>30</sup> Yin, Robert K. *Applications of case study research*. Sage, 2011. 60

employed through comparing multiple sub-categories within the larger master categories or frames of a “Dominant” discourse and “Dissenting” counter-discourse.

*Media Sources:* online and in-print news articles, media reports, interviews opinion columns, op-eds, blogs, social media websites, multimedia (i.e. radio and television reports as well as interviews) (see below for a detailed description of the media sources)

*Official documentations:* speeches, public statements, conferences, proposals, petitions, threat assessments,

*Secondary sources:* academic literature (journal articles, reviews, media surveys, books, conference documents, panel and committee statements) and analysis. Another secondary source that is crucial here is a civil society think-tank which embodies an increasingly important, and unique message in Israel today is founder of the “*Israel loves Iran*” project; Ronny Edry. *Israel loves Iran* was spearheaded by visual design artist Ronny Edry in the early months of October 2012, as an experimental social media stunt on Facebook. This once experimental post reaching out to Iranians with the simple but stoic message “Iranians we love you” attracted millions of views, hits, posts, and pictures in a matter of weeks. The goal of the “peace factory”, an NGO which has evolved out of this initiative, is to try and foster an honest political dialogue between the populations in spite of the harsh political banter between the two governments, and eventually re-humanize one another<sup>31</sup>. Since the ultimate aim of any form of qualitative triangulation for the social sciences is to validate research findings, with “converging lines of inquiry”<sup>32</sup>, it is the aim of this research project to validate the findings from primary media sources with the experiences of those whom hold perspectives which are both embraced as well as marginalized in mainstream Israeli political discourse.

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<sup>31</sup>“A Bridge of Communication Between the People in the Middle East : Peace Factory”. Israel Loves Iran, accessed on 03/01/13 from: <http://www.israelovesiran.com>.

<sup>32</sup>Yin, Robert K. *Applications of case study research*. SAGE Publications (2011). 19

## SELECTION OF MEDIA SOURCES

The data sample will come from a time period of approximately two years of media coverage in Israel and will focus on both the online, as well as, print publications of the top four most read online news publications in Israel: 1) Ha'aretz, 2) Jerusalem Post, 3)Ma'ariv, 4) Y-net News/Yedioth Achronoth. While these five newspapers occupy different places on the political spectrum, they provide an amazing amount of insight into the varying political views available in Israel on the issue of Iran's nuclear power. Despite the fact that the Jerusalem Post and Y-net are the most widely read and accessible online sources in Israel, as well as the most left on the political spectrum<sup>33</sup>, they are also some of the last in line to criticize Israel's actions, including the administration of Binyamin Netanyahu. However Ha'aretz, for example, is seen as the most balanced Israeli newspaper<sup>34</sup>, in presenting information which is extremely critical of the Netanyahu administration and is further critical on the political rhetoric espoused by both him and defense minister Ehud Barak.

While the national language in Israel is Hebrew, the selection of news articles was retrieved from internationally available online English databases, and therefore language was not a barrier to either the selection, analysis or logging of the dataset selected<sup>35</sup>. Nationally read news publications differ in terms of their level of patriotism, political orientation and willingness to provide consistently balanced and factually accurate reporting. Ha'aretz can be seen as unique in this regard. A number of studies highlight its role as the "leftist" and "most balanced" publication in Israel<sup>36</sup>. Supplementing this factor is

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<sup>33</sup>Caspi, D. (2008). "Israel: Media System". *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*. Blackwell (6) pp. 2536-2541.

<sup>34</sup>Caspi, Dan. "On Media and Politics: Between Enlightened Authority and Social Responsibility". *Israel Affairs* 11.1 (2005): 23-38.

<sup>35</sup> For a full presentation of these sources see Bibliography Section\*

<sup>36</sup>These studies range in subject matter beginning with Sharvit, Keren, & Daniel Bar-Tal. "Ethos of conflict in the Israeli media during the period of the violent confrontation." *The Israeli-Palestinian conflict—From conflict resolution to conflict management* (2007): 203-232, and moving towards Gordon, Neve "Rationalising Extra-Judicial Executions: The Israeli Press and the Legitimization of Abuse." , *The International Journal of Human*

the inclusion of articles from online Western publications, such as The Atlantic, The Daily Beast, Reuters and the New York Times, in at least every month of analysis within this study. In addition to the political orientation criteria, this study selected newspaper sources on the basis of the public accessibility and diversity of readership, and therefore utilized the top four news sources identified as “the most widely read” in the last ten years<sup>37</sup>. Ha’aretz has been one of the few Israeli publications, which is recognized within international “freedom of the press” ratings, as consistently promoting criticism of government policies and protection of journalist’s opinions, irrespective of their level of controversy<sup>38</sup>. Between the balanced political orientations of these news sources and their accessibility to most Israelis, this study chose these sources to reflect how the media acted as a central location through which both Dominant and Counter-Discourses emerged to articulate different voices in the debate on Iran’s status as Israel’s “greatest existential threat”. In this sense, Ha’aretz provided a great source for the voicing of dissention and challenges to the dominant ‘Iranian threat’ discourse projected by Netanyahu and his community of security experts, however, as this study demonstrates at certain moments throughout the period of study all four media publications focused public attention on the words of the dissenters.

#### CATEGORIZATION OF DOMINANT AND DISSENTING DISCOURSES

The categorization developed in this study relies on the identification of two main political discourses and the application of the concepts of a “debate” or “political spectacle”. Political Spectacles are defined within Critical Security Studies as “publicly visible contests that are mediated by political institutions, such as parliament, political rituals such as elections and addresses to the nation, and formats of publicly visible dispersing ideas and

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*Rights* 8, 3(2004) 305-324 & Zandberg, Eyal, and Motti Neiger. "Between the nation and the profession: Journalists as members of contradicting communities." *Media, Culture & Society* 27. 1 (2005): 131-141.

<sup>37</sup>Shifaz, Noam“‘The political line of Israeli papers (a reader’s guide)’”. Y-net Editorial. Web. & Caspi, D. (2008). “Israel: Media System”. *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*. Blackwell (6) pp. 2536-2541.

<sup>38</sup>“Freedom of the Press 2013 Index Ranking : Israel”. *Freedom of the Press*. Web

symbols such as the news media, pamphlets, and public opinion polling”<sup>39</sup>. In simpler terms they can be understood as “publicized process[es] of seeking and contesting legitimacy”, which typically present the participation of several actors and political communities<sup>40</sup>. The contestation of the Netanyahu administration’s qualification of the Iranian nuclear threat, within Israeli civil society, presents a concrete example of debate and political spectacle in so far as it has garnered the creation of competing political identities and communities. This study proposes the application of these concepts, yet looks to methodologically simplify the political spectacle<sup>41</sup> or contestation within the realm of civil society and media publication by focusing on two main camps – Dominant & Dissenting.

This simplification emerges from the study of academic Matt McDonald and his proposition that most Critical Security Studies analyses emanate from the construction of security issues through the “speech of dominant actors, usually political leaders”<sup>42</sup>. In the years of 2011 & 2012, it is possible to observe the presence of such a group of actors, and more importantly locate the contestation of its “dominant discourse” and “dominant narratives of identity” by a second group of actors termed “Dissenters”. This group of actors similarly contain their own discourse and political identity, yet are further composed of ex-heads of security institutions and intelligence communities, politicians, academics and civil society figures. McDonald’s proposition, is taken quite seriously within the proposed categorization in its insistence on compressing the discourse of dominant actors into seventeen categories which demonstrate its dominance within the political spectacle surrounding the Iranian nuclear threat. In constructing a narrative around the idea of an imminent Iranian nuclear threat, these actors lean on different discursive references and ideological linkages such as the connection of Iran to “the holocaust”, the “casting of doubt

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<sup>39</sup> Huysmans, Jef. *The politics of insecurity: Fear, migration and asylum in the EU*. Routledge, 2006. 60-63

<sup>40</sup> Huysmans, Jef. *The politics of insecurity: Fear, migration and asylum in the EU*. Routledge, 2006. 60-63

<sup>41</sup> Huysmans, Jef. *The politics of insecurity: Fear, migration and asylum in the EU*, 60-63

<sup>42</sup> McDonald, Matt. "Securitization and the Construction of Security." *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 4 (2008): 563

on sanctions” and the ability of allies to come to Israel’s aid during a time of impending “regional war”<sup>43</sup>.

The concept of narrative is more specifically constructed within Critical Security Studies, as a crucial element, alongside culture and identity, underpinning the process of securitization or the qualification of an issue as an existential threat. Throughout the time-period examined the discursive linkages supporting the dominant narrative projected by the Netanyahu administration concerning Iran’s nuclear presence, have been actively contested by a dissenting group of actors. These actors have assembled a counter-discourse which has effectively shattered many of the tenants present within the dominant narrative and such can be found within the forms of: 1) Disputing the Qualification of Iran as an Existential Threat, 2) Support for Sanctions & Alternatives to War, 3) Support for extended decision-making, public debate & political due process, and 3) American/International Objection.

The inability of any single political community to dominate the debate for an extended period of time qualifies the presence of debate and political spectacle<sup>44</sup> in the time frame examined, and further reinforces the need for the extensive categories outlined below. Furthermore what such dynamics demonstrate is the need for a guide to different moments throughout the debate, which reveal the incomplete securitization of the Iranian nuclear threat by dominant actors, in that such moments are able to map the presence of two competing discourses and political communities.

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<sup>43</sup>See *Table 1: Categorization of Dominant and Dissenting Discourses, Actors, Narratives and Media Sources* Discourses on the Iranian Threat : Dominant : 5-17

<sup>44</sup>Huysmans, Jef. *The politics of insecurity: Fear, migration and asylum in the EU*. Routledge, 2006. 60-63

*Table 1: Categorization of Dominant and Dissenting Discourses, Actors, Narratives and Media Sources*

<p><b>DISCOURSES ON THE IRANIAN THREAT</b></p>	<p>DISSENTING</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Disputing the Qualification of Iran as an Existential Threat</li> <li>2. Pro-Sanctions &amp; Alternatives to military confrontation</li> <li>3. Extended decision-making, public debate &amp; political due process</li> <li>4. American Objection and International Objection</li> </ol>
	<p>DOMINANT</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Iranian displays of nuclear power</li> <li>6. Calls/Support for Military Strike</li> <li>7. Criticism of Allies</li> <li>8. Iran is closer to the bomb</li> <li>9. Casting Doubt on Sanctions and Negotiations (Statements claiming that Iran is always an existential threat to Israel, and that the only possible course of action is war)</li> <li>10. Political Strategy &amp; Covert War</li> <li>11. Netanyahu's Vision /Statements</li> <li>12. Securitizing Moves (Public Announcements by Security Experts on the : Acquisition of Weapons, Emergency Drills &amp; War measures, as well as, Updated Threat projections, Strategic Postures and Assessments)</li> <li>13. The Holocaust &amp; Dominant discourse</li> <li>14. Mythology &amp; Past Israeli PMs conducting unilateral attacks against nuclear threats</li> <li>15. Political Echelon's Responses to Dissention</li> <li>16. USA &amp; International Support for Dominant Narrative</li> <li>17. Constructing a Political Community</li> </ol>
<p><b>TYPES OF ACTORS</b></p>	<p>DOMINANT</p>	<p>Netanyahu's security experts, politicians, public figures and innumerable other actors, looked to insert the logic of threat, emergency and exception into popular understandings of Iran's nuclear program within Israel.</p> <p>Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Former Minister of Defense Ehud Barak, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, Former head of Israeli Air Force General and Military attaché to the United States Amos Yadlin, Former Head of IDF Intelligence Gabi Ashkenazi, Current IDF Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, Former IDF Major General Mattan Vilnai, Israeli Ambassador the United States Michael Oren. Former Vice Prime Minister</p>

		Current Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon, Dan Meridor (Intelligence Agencies Minister) IDF Intelligence Research Department Director Brig. Gen. Itai Baron, Zalman Shoval(Former Ambassador to the US & Israel Hayom Columnist), Deputy Chief of Staff Yair Naveh, Shaul Chorev, Head of Israeli Atomic Energy Commission
	DISSENTING	Israeli ex-heads of Security & Intelligence Institutions, current politicians, academics, public figures, members of the Israeli Air Force and IDF, and members of the media Kochavi, Dagan, Diskin, Pardo, Moffaz, Halevy, Chalutz, Hanegbi, Farkesh, Ashkenazi(Aug 2012), Head of Labor MK Yechimotich, Benny Begin Dan Meridor and Eli Yishai, Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee chairman Ronnie Bar-On (Kadima), Uzi Arad(former national security adviser), Former Supreme Court justice Eliyahu Winograd, Gen Hayden (former CIA head during bombing of Syrian reactor), former Shin Bet chief Ami Ayalon
<b>THREAT NARRATIVE</b>	DOMINANT	Political Statements – speeches, interviews, public addresses, Knesset meeting leaks, conference, UNGA statements Threat assessments and threat projections (i.e. Israeli think tanks like INSS and IDC Herzeliya), announcement of military drills, Threat simulations, casualty projections, announcement of military preparedness (i.e. announcements of advanced preparedness)
	DISSENTING	Political Statements – speeches, interviews, public addresses, conferences, think-tank statements, committee statements, op-eds/Editorials, petitions & protests
<b>MEDIA MATERIAL</b>	DOMINANT	Political Statements – speeches, interviews, public warnings, national security conferences, national security assessments, closed-cabinet releases,
	DISSENTING	Online news articles Commentary, Editorials & Op-eds Radio broadcasts & interviews Social Media (One Jerusalem & IranlovesIsrael) TV broadcasts (very limited) Blog posts (very limited)



### SECTION 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Section 3 explores three crucial elements for understanding the Iranian nuclear debate in Israel and the extent to which the debate's dynamics exhibit the process of an attempted securitization by a Dominant political community of actors under the leadership of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Ehud Barak. This Section first reviews the history of political relations between Israel and Iran and emphasizes the presence of critical scholarship within Israeli civil society concerning the ideological narrative constructed around the presence of an existential Iranian enemy. It then discusses Israeli scholarship on the progression and general trajectory of the Iranian nuclear debate with central reference to various moments of escalation and great volume of discourse. Finally the literature provided looks at one of the last junctures within Israel's past, where a Prime Minister constructed a public policy forum around the need to attack a rivaling nuclear program in the region. The case of Israel's unilateral bombing of Iraq's Osiraq reactor in June 1982 and PM Menachem Begin's insistence on preventing another nuclear holocaust demonstrates a similar instance in Israel's past whereby the vehicles of ideology, and security discourse were utilized to make a case for war.

#### WHAT IS ISRAEL AND WHAT IS IRAN: FRIENDSHIP TODAY & ENMITY TOMORROW

When it comes to exploring the more basic question of Iranian-Israeli relations, there exist a number of secondary sources that characterize the relationship between the two nations as "peaceful" and reinforced by mutual security concerns. Case in point is the work of Iranian scholar Trita Parsi, who argues that the alliance between Israel and Iran was based on the "perception of common threats" and the creation of mutual economic ties between the two nations.<sup>45</sup> Parsi's work additionally focuses on the rich relationship between the United

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<sup>45</sup>Parsi, Trita. *Treacherous alliance: the secret dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States*. (New Haven : Yale University Press,2007): 1,7

States and Iran, shedding light on why the attainment of nuclear arms by the Iranian regime and Israel has overshadowed the changing relationship between the two powers<sup>46</sup>. Parsi looks to explore the depth, as well as, shape of cooperation between the two nations through examining what can be termed “the triangle of US, Israeli and Iranian relations”. Parsi’s analysis is unique in that draws out and explores periods of positive relations between any two parts of this conceptual triangle of nations, and particularly sheds light on the influence of military doctrines within Israeli foreign policy determinations, such as David Ben Gurion’s enduring *doctrine of the periphery*<sup>47</sup>.

This military doctrine, explored at length throughout Parsi’s work outside of “Traacherous Alliance”, demanded that Israeli policy makers and politicians subscribe to the view that “since peace with the Arabs remained highly unlikely, Israeli security was best achieved by forging alliances with the Middle East’s non-Arab states”, such as Iran and Turkey<sup>48</sup>. Parsi’s focus on military doctrine as a central source of ideological support and guidance for Israeli foreign policy concerning Iran is crucial for this analysis in that it points towards the conclusion that the discourse of enmity and exclusion heavily present within Netanyahu’s dominant discourse concerning Iran has not always been an endemic part of Israeli politics or foreign policy. Parsi’s analysis, however, is somewhat limited by the fact that it is unable to base its conclusions with primary data from Iran collected post-revolution, as well as its International Relations Orientation which is primarily Realist-centered<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup>Parsi, Trita. "Israel-Iranian relations assessed: Strategic competition from the power cycle perspective." *Iranian Studies* 38.2 (2005): 247

<sup>47</sup>Parsi, “Israel-Iranian relations assessed: Strategic competition from the power cycle perspective,” 247

<sup>48</sup> Parsi, “Israel-Iranian relations assessed: Strategic competition from the power cycle perspective,” 267

<sup>49</sup> Zia-Ebrahimi, Reza. "Traacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the United States." *Iranian Studies* 44.5 (2011): 782-4. Web. 15 Feb. 2014.

Central within Israeli academia is the idea that the Israeli public has widely contested the Netanyahu administration's attempted labeling of nuclear-Iran as the "greatest existential threat facing the state of Israel" and the "Jewish people"<sup>50</sup>. Academics and journalists writing with Israeli think tank Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) Yehuda Ben Meir, Zaki Shalom, Shai Feldman and Shimon Stein, all provide an excellent answer to the question of what makes this debate unique, as an instance of extended civil society participation in matters of national security. What these authors further offer is a substantiation of the focus taken within this analysis in terms of the need to look towards specific moments at which high levels of acceptance and rejection of the Dominant discourse on Iranian nuclear ambitions and intentions towards Israel has taken shape.

### **The Debate's unique Qualitative Shape**

Academic Yehuda Ben Meir has argues that the Iranian nuclear debate "...differs qualitatively from other issues in security/operational and political terms"<sup>51</sup>. Ben Meir's analysis contextualizes the Iranian debate as "unique", and its reaching "unprecedented proportions" for several reasons. The presence of open public debate itself on issues of national security in Israel has "preceded" most decisions on "going to war" in Israel, however, what distinguishes this threat from others is the set of actors which are present within such a debate<sup>52</sup>. In encompassing actors from Israel's "former security establishment" as well as intellectuals such as "writers and academics", this debate has rendered opposition to mainstream decision-making bodies traditionally tasked with deciding on Israel's most crucial matters of national security, such as the IDF, Security Intelligence Agencies (Mossad & Shin Bet), as well as, the political elite in power. While past debates have demonstrated the features endemic to the insular communities of

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<sup>50</sup> Ben Meir, Yehuda. "The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran". *INSS* (2013): 232.

<sup>51</sup> Ben Meir, Y. "The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran," 234

<sup>52</sup> Ben Meir, Y. "The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran," 232

“security experts” aforementioned, ripe with “absolute secrecy”, codes of conduct , and the disclosure of “minimal information to the public”, this debate has surpassed such parameters. For example, the debates surrounding the Osirak and Syria’s Dzir Al Azur reactors, included year-long deliberations, closed-cabinet sessions, clear objection from the political opposition, heads of Israel’s main security intelligence communities voicing opposition to the attacks, and mass resignations taking place<sup>53</sup>. Most importantly, these were features which stressed low levels of public transparency, and inaccessibility, further insulating the final decision to authorize a unilateral attack within closed communities of elite actors.

In the specific instance of the Osiraq bombing, despite the overwhelming presence of dissent in to the idea of attacking, it was authorized in June 1982, and the more than year-long discussions leading up to it were kept “far away from the public eye”<sup>54</sup>. Similarly the attack on the Syrian Dzir Al-Azur reactor encompassed Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s convening of <sup>55</sup>secret meetings, some of which were “at his residence on Jerusalem’s Balfour Street” as opposed to the traditional Prime Ministerial Office, consultation of “several of his predecessors” including “Shimon Peres, Benjamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak”, as well as, the requirement that all heads of Security Intelligence agencies “sign a secrecy agreement”<sup>56</sup>. Much like Osiraq, the Syrian Reactor was not debated publicly and lacked unconditional support from the internal security apparatus and political opposition.

As Ben Meir points out the Iranian debate has lacked both this restrictive “closed forum” format, for two main reasons. Firstly Ben Meir, as well as, academics Shimon Stein, Shlomo Brom and Shai Feldman, point towards the timeline of the debate, in terms of Netanyahu and Barak’s construction of the Iranian threat beginning in the years preceding

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<sup>53</sup>Ford, Peter S. “Israel’s Attack on Osiraq: A Model for Future Preventive Strikes?”. *Inst For National Security Studies Us Air Force Academy Co*(2005):24

<sup>54</sup>Ben Meir, Yehuda. “The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran”. *INSS* (2013): 233

<sup>55</sup>Harel, Amos “Code Name: Arizona.” *Haaretz*, 09/11/2012.Web

<sup>56</sup>Harel, “Code Name: Arizona,” *Haaretz*, 09/11/2012.Web.

Netanyahu's rise to power as Prime Minister. The authors focus predominantly on March 2009, where Netanyahu began to invoke comparisons between Israel, the international community's treatment of the Iranian nuclear threat and 1938 Europe<sup>57</sup>. These comparisons later evolved into a more coherent discourse around a nuclear-Iran posing the threat of "a second holocaust". Such a reference has effectively granted Netanyahu the ability to then suggest that his role, as Prime Minister of Israel, is to not only prevent such atrocities from harming the "state of Israel", but more importantly, "the fate of the Jewish people"<sup>58</sup>. Netanyahu made this statement during his April 2012 Speech on Yom Hashoa-International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

While the speech given by Israeli political leadership at these ceremonies traditionally involves declarations of Jewish and Zionist progress and perseverance since the perils and horrors of Nazi oppression, Netanyahu dedicated almost the entire address to the Iranian issue, further "emphasizing his obligation as Prime Minister to prevent the danger to the Jewish people of another Holocaust"<sup>59</sup>.

Another unique dimension of this debate is the urgency and alarmism of the discourse initiated by Netanyahu and his former Defense Minister Ehud Barak. According to Stein et al. Barak only came to "join the chorus" early 2012, where his statements and pronouncements concerning the imminence of the Iranian nuclear threat escalated drastically<sup>60</sup>. Case-in-point are his speeches at military graduations, and security forums or conferences such as the annual "Security Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" Conference in Tel Aviv in May 2012, where "Netanyahu and Barak spoke about the Iranian threat in a nearly

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<sup>57</sup>Stein, Shimon et al. "The Public Discussion of Israel's Strategy regarding a Nuclear Iran", *INSS Insight* (January 2012): 3

<sup>58</sup>Mualem, Mazal. "Netanyahu Plays the Iran Card in Israeli Politics". *Al-Monitor*, 26/11/2013. Web.

<sup>59</sup>Mualem, M. "Netanyahu Plays the Iran Card in Israeli Politics". *Al-Monitor*, 26/11/2013. Web.

<sup>60</sup>Stein, Shimon et al. "The Public Discussion of Israel's Strategy regarding a Nuclear Iran", *INSS Insight* (January 2012): 3

identical style”<sup>61</sup>. These speeches qualified Barak’s invocation of political images and speech-acts, such as the “zone of immunity” and “the sword being at Israel’s throat”, and can thus be seen as important attempts to register the threat of Iran within terms of threat, emergency, unease, and exception. However what the Iranian nuclear debate has demonstrated is that the activation of a Dominant discourse around the idea of an Iranian nuclear threat has generated a political Counter discourse and community of dissenters.

### **The Emergence of Dissent**

One can chart the emergence of dissent and discourse running counter to Netanyahu’s insistence on the presence of an imminent Iranian nuclear threat to the date of May 6<sup>th</sup> 2011, where former head of the Mossad Meir Dagan stated to a crowd of University Students, politicians and members of the Israeli media that: “Whoever attacks Iran must understand that he may start a regional war in which missiles from Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon will be fired. The Iranian problem must be made an international problem and we must continue to act to delay the development of Iran’s nuclear capabilities”<sup>62</sup>. Dagan’s denouncement of the threat and Netanyahu’s proposed unilateral role in thwarting Iran’s nuclear program, started an onslaught of academic and popular media scholarship which critically questioned his dominant discourse’s naming Iran the “greatest existential threat” facing the world today.

Dagan’s words were echoed by a critical mass of former heads of Security Intelligence Agencies in Israel, and the political elite among which were Chief of Military Intelligence Aviv Kochavi, Former Head of the Shin Bet Yuval Diskin, Former Head of the Mossad Tamir Pardo, Head of Israel’s political opposition Shaul Moffaz, Head of the

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<sup>61</sup>Shavit, Ari. “Top Israel official: Iran nuclear threat bigger than one Israel faced before Six-Day War”. Ha’aretz. 08/10/12. Web.

<sup>62</sup>Inbar, Efraim, ed. *The Arab Spring, Democracy and Security: Domestic and International Ramifications*. Routledge, 2013:130

Meretz political party Tzachi Hanegbi, Former head of the Mossad Ephraim Halevy, and Former IDF Chief of Staff Dan Halutz<sup>63</sup>.

Central within this massive community of dissenters' counter-discourse to Netanyahu's projection of the Iranian threat, are Former head of the Shin Bet Yuval Diskin's statements on the matter, which more directly criticize the ability of Netanyahu and Barak to lead Israel competently. Diskin's remarks aim towards casting Netanyahu's obsession with the Iranian nuclear threat as bordering "messianic" and "reckless", in that they are not assessments grounded in reality but instead in the desire to take "massive operational risks" in the name of national security<sup>64</sup>. Diskin's comments have been reified by the countless objections of Kadima Minister of Knesset Shaul Mofaz, whom has similarly debated against Netanyahu's willingness to engage "the future of our sons and daughters" in "reckless operational adventures", "dangerous and irresponsible" policy decisions, and the destruction of Israel's alliance with the United States<sup>65</sup>.

This particular type of political opposition would only expand with the US election approaching in the winter of 2012, and as such the mass coverage by mainstream newspapers, such as Haaretz, Ma'ariv, and Israel Hayom began to narrow their focuses on Israel's military readiness relative to Iran. These newspapers all published articles in early August 2012 which presented vastly different opinions concerning the prospect of Israel bombing Iran before the coming US elections, as well as, charges of the political echelon having war-mongered in recent weeks to try and rally Israeli public opinion towards the prospect of attacking Iran's nuclear facilities.

Stein et al. highlight the counter-discourse presented by the community of dissenters concerning the need for enhanced public debate, and further identify the ethos underlying

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<sup>63</sup>For a Complete list of these actors See *Table 1: Categorization of Dominant and Dissenting Discourses, Actors, Narratives and Media Sources*, Types of Actors : Dissenting

<sup>64</sup>Lappin, Yaakov. "Former Shin Bet chief slams 'messianic' PM, Barak". The Jerusalem Post,04/29/2012. Web.

<sup>65</sup>Ronen, Gil. "Mofaz Hints He Opposes Imminent Iran Strike". Arutz Sheva. 07/23/2012

their criticism as taking on two main dimensions. Primarily these actors looked to question the characterization of the Iranian threat as “existential”, as well as, the substantial membership within both the political and media echelons supporting Netanyahu’s conceptualization of the threat as such. Prime example are the statements by Chief of Staff Benny Gantz on Iran’s regional influence as a key transporter of arms to all of Israel’s greatest enemies, and his insistence on military preparation for a “multi-front” war<sup>66</sup>.

Ben Meir highlights one particularly striking moment of counter-discourse in his discussion of a petition signed by academics, public figures, artists, and former politicians, as the last major objection to Netanyahu’s case for war with Iran before the debate became open to a more American and International set of influences<sup>67</sup>. The signatories of this petition argued that “waging war under existing conditions would be a “reckless gamble” that could “endanger [Israel’s] very existence”<sup>68</sup>. The core sentiment of the petition, in terms of a direct denial of any public influence within estimations of threat perception and eventually the waging of war, was echoed by President Shimon Peres in an interview with Channel 2 News, where he denounced “the Israeli military option” by stating in reference to pursuing unilateral military action that “it is clear to us that we cannot do it alone”<sup>69</sup>.

### **“We no longer dwelleth alone” and public opinion**

While these words were initially uttered first by Prime Minister Yitzhac Rabin in the years leading up to his election as Prime Minister of Israel in 1992<sup>70</sup>, they represent a central political fault line in the debate on Iranian nuclear capability, in terms of Israel’s relationship with the United States. In August 2012, with the United States election

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<sup>66</sup>Benari, Elad. “Benny Gantz: We Need to be Prepared for a Multi-Front War - Golan Commander: Be Prepared for the Worst,” *Ynet*, 08/10/2012

<sup>67</sup>Ravid, Barak. “A Call to Pilots: Our Fate is in your Hands – Don’t Bomb,” *Ynet*, 08/16/2012. Web

<sup>68</sup>Ben Meir, Yehuda. “The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran”. *INSS* (2013): 236

<sup>69</sup>Ben, Meir, Y. “The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran,” 236

<sup>70</sup>Laqueur W., and Rubin, B., (eds.) “The Arab-Israeli Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict” (New York; Penguin) 2008: 404

approaching the debate within Israeli media and civil society was at somewhat of its climax in terms of both the level of political attention diverted to the Iranian issue within mainstream news publications, as well as, the volume of statements issued by the Netanyahu government. Case in point were the statements issued by Netanyahu demanding that the international community and especially the United States under the leadership of Barack Obama set “a line which Iran cannot cross in its pursuit of the development of nuclear weapons”<sup>71</sup>. Netanyahu would later formalize such a line through his speech to the United Nations General Assembly on September 27<sup>th</sup>.

### **Israeli-American Rift**

It was at this point that the debate came to take on new shape and scope in that “Netanyahu, for the first time in public, unequivocally set the summer of 2013 as the last chance to stop the Iranian nuke before it's too late”. Barak’s statements looking to amend the rift Netanyahu constructed between the United States and Israel, took the shape of more mild statements about the imminence of the Iranian threat, as well as, innumerable public attempts to reconcile Israeli’s alliance with the U.S. on the basis that despite having “common goals...there are there are certain differences in the positions of the US and Israel[on Iran]”<sup>72</sup>. It is in the aftermath of this juncture that the level of dominant discourse concerning the Iranian nuclear threat has both resurfaced and faded from public attention. What this countervailing dynamic has lead to is somewhat of a split within Israeli popular opinion in accepting the position that Israel should attack Iran’s nuclear facilities. The National Security and Public Opinion Project at the Institute for National Security Studies 2009-12 poll demonstrates this reality in observing a 11% drop in support for an attack on

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<sup>71</sup>Keinon, Herb. “US: Setting red lines for Iran is not useful”. The Jerusalem Post. 09/11/2012. Web

<sup>72</sup>Israel Hayom Staff & Keinon, Herb “International community must set clear red lines for Iran' & PM: Time for world to set 'clear red lines' for Iran, Netanyahu has lost the world’s attention on Iran”. Israel Hayom, The Jerusalem Post. 09/03/12. Web.

Iranian nuclear facilities within the overall Israeli public<sup>73</sup>. Ben Meir and others point to this finding in strengthening the idea that public objections and dissention displayed by mainstream ex-military figures and members of Israel's security, have somewhat impacted public perceptions of Netanyahu's discourse around Iran.

#### ISRAELI PERCEPTIONS OF THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR THREAT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF OSIRAQ & IRAN

The concepts of national security and existential threat in Israel take on somewhat of a different meaning due to the presence of what academic Avner Cohen calls "*kedushat habitachon*" - the centrality and "sacredness" of security in Israel<sup>74</sup>. In examining the public policy debates surrounding existentially threatening nuclear 'enemies' facing Israel today, such as Iran, it becomes immediately clear that *kedushat habitachon* is much more than a collectively shared impulse, and can more be more accurately understood as one of the organizing principles of social and political decision-making in Israel. The case of the preemptive bombing of the Osiraq nuclear reactor in Iraq in June 1982 and the current debate about Iranian nuclear capability, demonstrate two instances where Israel's foreign policy was heavily informed by the concept<sup>75</sup>.

Within these debates it is possible to see a high level of continuity in the role played by "*kedushat habitachon*" or the "sacredness of security"<sup>76</sup> and military style thinking in both the naming of existential threats to Israel's security and the survival of a Jewish nation. This paper will primarily present the arguments put forth by Kobi Michael and Baruch Kimmerling, in demonstrating the need to understand how the presence of militarized doctrine in issues of security have blurred the line between military and political

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<sup>73</sup>Ben Meir, Yehuda and Bagno-Moldavsky, Olena. "Vox Populi: Trends in Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2004-2009". *Institute for National Security Studies*, 106 (2010): 63.

<sup>74</sup>Sections of the following analysis were selected from a piece submitted to Dr. Peter Jones as part of my work as a student of his Politics & Conflicts in the Middle East class (API 6399 C : Fall 2013)

<sup>75</sup>Cohen, A. *Israel & the Bomb* (New York : Columbia University Press, 2013):339

<sup>76</sup>Cohen, *Israel & the Bomb*, 339

decision making in ways that prevent political and non-military thought from influencing foreign policy decisions on such issues<sup>77</sup>. This section will draw on the work of Avi Shilon and Shai Feldman, who argue that Osiraq represents a closed military debate, restricted to a small community of decision makers, which displayed an overwhelming commitment to following the Begin doctrine and marginalized the need for political calculations in the process<sup>78</sup>. After examining the dynamics present during the Osiraq decision, this section will further explore how the current Iranian nuclear issue is a unique instance of political-military debate in Israel, which has defied the dynamics of past debates surrounding the possibility of a unilateral attack on an existentially threatening nuclear program in the region.

In making the claim that the Iranian nuclear threat has garnered an unprecedented level of public debate in Israel, it is instructive to define exactly how and why past policy discussions or debates have either mirrored such or lacked the participation of public and non-military actors. To present this issue simply, as academic Efraim Inbar has, security and defense decision-making in Israel "... has always been extremely centralized and has remained the coveted privilege of the very few"<sup>79</sup>. The overwhelming reality has thus been that the Defense Minister in conjunction with their select security advisors have "almost exclusive authority" over decision making in matters of security and defense<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup>Michael, Kobi. "Who Really Dictates What an Existential Threat Is? The Israeli Experience". *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32.5(2009):687-713 & Kimmerling, Baruch. *Clash of Identities: Explorations in Israeli and Palestinian Societies*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 154-79

<sup>78</sup>Ben Meir, Yehuda. "The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran". *INSS* (2013): 232

<sup>79</sup>Inbar, Efraim. "Israeli National Security, 1973-96." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 555. 1 (1998): 63

<sup>80</sup>Inbar, E. "Israeli National Security, 1973-96": 63

Bar-Tal further maintains that the Israeli state's consistent projection of existential threats through military doctrines, has in many ways led to a profound double-movement in Israeli society, producing a heightened sense of trust in the IDF as the central actor in decisions concerning Israel's security, and a heightened sense of *insecurity* among Israeli civilians<sup>81</sup>. Bar-Tal's analysis speaks directly to the idea expressed by Kobi Michael in terms of the suggestion that a normalized part of Israeli politics is the need to constantly project the presence of threats to Israel's existence. What this routinized feature of Israeli politics therefore renders is a state ripe with the condition of 'insecurity', and therefore the replacement of political contestation with the need for enclosed militarized decision-making. Furthermore, this social feature of Israel demonstrates why military figures and military experts are widely perceived as the "epistemic authority" on naming, and thereby deciding, the means to eliminate threats marked as existential. The permanence of war inevitably leads to the creation of a decision-making system where increased legitimacy is gained by those representing such an authority.

In many ways, this dynamic has emerged in Israeli society through the use of military doctrines, and has led to the increased ability of military actors and security experts to consistently influence the re-construction of new threats facing the Jewish nation. In the aftermath of the "border wars" facing Israel, the idea of *mamlachtiyut*, "unity despite difference", emerged as the central determinant of Israeli national identity, and became one of the foundational organizing principles of the military's relationship with the realm of politics in Israel<sup>82</sup>.

Kimmerling defines this newly established relationship as emanating from the idea that due to the state's distinctive role as the monopolist over violence, and thus the military

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<sup>81</sup>Barak, Oren & Sheffer, Gabriel. *Existential Threats and Civil Security Relations* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009) : 223

<sup>82</sup>Barak & Sheffer. *Existential Threats and Civil Security Relations*, 164

– the state “became the central actor in society and stateness”<sup>83</sup>. This idea was able to take hold, mainly because of the consistent presence of regional attacks on Israel, and therefore the perceived need to build a society that carries a constant level of civil-military readiness and preparedness for conflict. This preparedness entailed the prioritization of short-term militarized perceptions of Israeli security expressed by the state, over and above those concerned with long-term political calculations.

The military doctrine in focus for this analysis is known as the ‘Begin doctrine’ and can be summarized as encompassing the logic that since the threat of a regional war constantly looms, Israel must develop unconventional capacities, such as nuclear weapons, which eliminate the conventional asymmetries between itself and its Arab neighbors. The most crucial aspect of this doctrine, however, is not its suggestion of Israel’s need to develop nuclear weapon as an “insurance policy” against regional war, but more importantly the need to deny her enemies the development of such weapons<sup>84</sup>.

The architect of this doctrine, former Prime Minister Menachem Begin, was a holocaust survivor and Irgun leader who in 1978 was able to arrive at this policy through invoking the common “one against many” perception of Israel’s place in the region. This perception stressed the need to compensate for Israel’s lacking number of allies in the region, through the direct prevention of her enemies developing unconventional capacities. “We shall not allow our enemies to develop nuclear weapons against our people” in this way became Israel’s official policy and mantra on nuclear proliferation in the region for every Prime Minister succeeding Begin to date, including Sharon, Barak, Olmert and Netanyahu<sup>85</sup>. The genesis of this doctrine came at a time when Israel under Begin identified Saddam Hussein and his insistence on the annihilation of Israel in the name of the

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<sup>83</sup> Barak & Sheffer. *Existential Threats and Civil Security Relations*, 163

<sup>84</sup> Kimmerling, Baruch. *Clash of Identities: Explorations in Israeli and Palestinian Societies*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009):174

<sup>85</sup> Kimmerling, Baruch. *Clash of Identities: Explorations in Israeli and Palestinian Societies*,174

Palestinian cause as a threat mirroring the holocaust. During one of Begin's addresses to his security cabinet in October of 1979, he charted the Iraqi's purchase of a 70 Megawatt "swimming pool light-water reactor" to be loaded with 93 percent uranium-235 as the one of the greatest "dangers facing the Zionist enterprise"<sup>86</sup>.

### **Dissent and Opposition**

It was at this juncture that he decided to ignore both political appeals by opposition leader Shimon Peres to "refrain from exercising the option discussed" for it would render Israel "a heath in the desert" from a political standpoint as well as betray her "national interests". Peres' remarks were pointed at Begin's proposed timetable for bombing the reactor, which sacrificed the option of extended diplomacy in favor of the logic that there was a small window of opportunity to prevent the emergence of another Hitler in the Middle East<sup>87</sup>.

Peres was not, however, alone in his objections at the time and received a great deal of support from the heads of security institutions, such as the Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Yadin, Head of the Mossad Yitzchak Chofi and Head of IDF Intelligence Shlomo Gazit<sup>88</sup>. These three men in conjunction with Peres shunned the idea of bombing the reactor in several closed meetings and correspondences with Begin, taking three main standpoints on the issue. Firstly Shlomo Gazit, Head of IDF Intelligence, argued that such actions would harm Israel's international standing and potentially spoil diplomatic negotiations and peace with Egypt at the time, in that they would make Egyptian President Anwar Sadat appear a collaborator to Israeli grand strategy in the Middle East. A second point of contention was voiced by the Head of the Mossad Yitzchack Chofi, who expressed the sentiment that while

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<sup>86</sup> Shilon, Avi. *Menachem Begin*. (London :Yale University Press, 2012) :340

<sup>87</sup> Shilon, A. *Menachem Begin*, 341

<sup>88</sup> Shilon, A. *Menachem Begin*, 341-2

bombing the reactor might temporarily delay the progress of the Iraqi nuclear program, it would not influence Saddam's insistence on obtaining a nuclear weapon<sup>89</sup>.

The third and final set of criticisms were voiced by Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Yadin and were aimed at the idea that bombing Osiraq at that specific point in time, posed the risk of forcing the Iraqi program, in its infancy at the time, deeper underground and giving Saddam and his followers in the Arab world cause to re-double such efforts. These criticisms all reflected the sentiment that Begin needed to take more seriously the lacking level of information on the material capabilities of the Iraqi program, as opposed to focusing on the rhetoric of a hyper-nationalist leader with revisionist intentions.

It is crucial to mention that Saddam was indeed, at least from a rhetorical standpoint, bent on the destruction of Israel and the annihilation of the "Zionist enterprise"<sup>90</sup>. However it is also important to mention that the Iraqi threat was neither new nor as existentially threatening as Begin had constructed it to be at the time. In inheriting the intelligence surrounding the Iraqi construction of a nuclear reactor from former Prime Minister Yitchack Rabin who discussed these issues with him on several occasions and briefed him on the presence of the threat in 1978, Begin was well acquainted with the details of Saddam's purchase of the reactor from the French<sup>91</sup>.

What these facts provoke is the conclusion that the reactor was less of a sporadic crisis emerging to threaten Israel's existence and more so a threat to its security which had been evaluated by the previous administration, as neither imminent nor decisive. Instead, it was actually Begin who in many ways constructed the timeline with which this threat had to be dealt with through attempting to insert the logic that the Iraqi threat was one in which there was a narrow window of opportunity to address. In Cabinet meetings, Begin combined this emergency-style logic with imagery from the holocaust to make his case for

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<sup>89</sup> Shilon, A. *Menachem Begin*, 342

<sup>90</sup> Shilon, A. *Menachem Begin*, 342

<sup>91</sup> Shilon, A. *Menachem Begin*, 340

the bombing of the reactor, and was therefore able to insert the aforementioned concept of preemption into his doctrine. What effect this tactic had on his Cabinet is similar to that aforementioned by Baruch Kimmerling in excluding the “complementary social planning and vision” necessary in deliberative democratic decision-making by insisting on the need for *mamlachtiyut* or the primacy of military doctrine and thinking in matters of the state<sup>92</sup>.

Begin directly minimized considerations, such as the material capabilities of the program, and as a result the final decision to authorize the preemptive bombing proved to be a short-term success, in that it mildly curbed Iraq’s ambition to build a nuclear bomb, but was a long-term failure, in that it offered “the Arabs a new form of resistance to Israel’s perceived intention to maintain nuclear superiority indefinitely.”<sup>93</sup> In ignoring these factors, Begin decided that the issue of preventing a nuclear threat from harming the future fate of a Jewish state would be one of his defining legacies as Prime Minister. In this light what informed the construction of his doctrine were neither long-term political calculations nor military pragmatism, but more so an “anxiety for the fate of the country” as expressed through the logic of “Never Again”, as well as, his rush to force himself into Israel’s history as the Prime Minister who prevented another holocaust<sup>94</sup>.

### **Ideological Construction of the Threat**

This logic put at its forefront the need to respond to the “Butcher of Baghdad” and re-incarnation of “Hitler” in Saddam Hussein; a man bent on the use of chemical weapons “against the Zionist enemy”.<sup>95</sup> Hussein’s words and actions in many ways justified Begin’s threat perception, for example stating openly in 1976 that “the Franco-Iraqi agreement was the first actual step in the production of an Arab atomic weapon, despite the fact that the declared purpose for the establishment of the reactor is not the production of atomic

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<sup>92</sup>Kimmerling, Baruch. *Clash of Identities: Explorations in Israeli and Palestinian Societies*:167

<sup>93</sup>Feldman, Shai. “The Bombing of Osiraq Revisited,” *International Security* 7.2 (1982): 136

<sup>94</sup>Ford, Peter S. “Israel’s Attack on Osiraq: A Model for Future Preventive Strikes?”. *Inst For National Security Studies Us Air Force Academy Co*(2005): 12

<sup>95</sup>Ford, Peter S. “Israel’s Attack on Osiraq: A Model for Future Preventive Strikes?,”12

weapons”<sup>96</sup>. What these assessments of Saddam ignored, however, was the fact that he was bluffing, as is revealed by IAEA document today which declare that Osiraq never had the necessary fuel infrastructure to produce a nuclear bomb and therefore was nothing more than a nuclear research facility<sup>97</sup>. Nonetheless, for Begin, attaching existentially threatening qualities to Saddam and the threat of Iraqi nuclearization in Cabinet meetings and combining them with the strongly supported references towards the need to prevent another holocaust, allowed him to create a doctrine on Israeli nuclear weapons posture and simultaneously restrict the parameters of the decision-making process leading up to the bombing in 1982.

Within this doctrine was a distinct timeline for action, as Begin expressed the fear that since Iran had bombed the reactor in the recent past, there was only a limited timeline in which the fallout of nuclear materials for an attack would not affect civilian centers in the area. In other words, Begin used the idea that “the children of Baghdad are not our enemies” to ensure that the bombing took place within the timeline he suggested<sup>98</sup>. Furthermore the parameters of decision-making in this instance were confined to his exclusive role as both the Prime Minister and Defense Minister, and therefore the final arbiter of when and whether a decision was to be taken regarding a unilateral military strike on the Iraqi reactor. In the moments leading up to his decision the audience responsible for pushing the button in a sense were himself and Foreign Minister Yitzchack Shamir. Begin in fact even left his Deputy Prime Minister Yigael Yadin completely in the dark concerning this decision, which immediately caused Yadin to resign in the months succeeding the attack<sup>99</sup>.

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<sup>96</sup>Ford, Peter S. “Israel's Attack on Osiraq: A Model for Future Preventive Strikes?,”14

<sup>97</sup>Ford, Peter S. “Israel's Attack on Osiraq: A Model for Future Preventive Strikes?,”12

<sup>98</sup>Ford, Peter S. “Israel's Attack on Osiraq: A Model for Future Preventive Strikes?,”12

<sup>99</sup>Ford, Peter S. “Israel's Attack on Osiraq: A Model for Future Preventive Strikes?,” 24

## **Institutional**

This mode of decision-making can in many ways be understood as allowing for two previously discussed factors to prevail in terms of: 1) the presence of personal or ideological influence, through the adherence to military doctrine for example, and 2) the marginalization of extended deliberation and political debate. What can thus be seen in the instance of the Osiraq decision is the attempt to position the concept of *mamlachtiyut* and thus insert the same politics of exception, speed and emergency, which permitted previous governments in Israel to construct pre-emptive military campaigns as wars of no choice<sup>100</sup>. What these dynamics lead to were the construction of threat assessments which were both uninformed by objective facts, as best demonstrated by the reality that despite Saddam's virulent rhetoric towards Israel; he simply lacked the tools to produce a nuclear weapons program capable of harming Israel. More recent assessments of the Iraqi nuclear program, for example, determine the program to have been "directionless", "disorganized" and in a "state of drift" in 1982<sup>101</sup>.

Furthermore, the government of Israel's release of information to the international media preceding the bombing in June 1982, characterized Iraq as a nuclear weapons "Pandora's Box" and can further be seen as another part of the government's direct attempt to minimize the reality that not a great number of facts were known about Iraq's nuclear program at the time<sup>102</sup>. All that Begin really had by way of empirical support for the bombing of the reactor was the premonition that Saddam was bent on the destruction of Israel, and the suggestion by Minister Ariel Sharon, that it needed to be done soon.

It was nothing more than these factors coupled with Begin's insistence on an ideologically driven military doctrine, which allowed him to dictate the level and terms of

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<sup>100</sup>Kimmerling, Baruch (2008). *Clash of Identities: Explorations in Israeli and Palestinian Societies*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 167

<sup>101</sup>Braut-Hegghammer, Malfrid. "Attacks on Nuclear Infrastructure: Opening Pandora's Box?" *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*(October 2011) : 3

<sup>102</sup>Ford, Peter S. "Israel's Attack on Osiraq: A Model for Future Preventive Strikes?," 43

internal debate surrounding the issue. What resulted was a model of decision-making which encompassed mainly military figures whom would ensure the low level of political debate or opposition to Begin's mission of "...no holocaust in this century!"<sup>103</sup>. What Yehuda Ben Meir calls a debate conducted "far away from the public eye" was therefore the only venue in which such strong ideology coupled with military style thinking could materialize into a foreign policy<sup>104</sup>. Begin's personal mission, much like that of the current Prime Minister of Israel Binyamin Netanyahu can be cast under the same critical light of disallowing for the entry of the public into what is considered a strictly military debate, for military experts which understand Israel's most critical frontier – its security.

One of the driving reasons which allows for this style of decision making to persist is what historian Lewis Brownstein defines as the need for "improvised" and "unplanned" foreign policy decisions issued by the PM alone because of "the monumental successes" of such strategies in establishing "a collective memory on the part of the leadership"<sup>105</sup>. In other words, there was a general sense among the executive leadership in Israel that because this style of decision-making had succeeded in the time of Ben Gurion, when Israel was faced with the threat of dormant border wars, it could and should surely succeed in the respective times of Prime Minister's Begin and Netanyahu. Netanyahu can therefore be seen as quite similar to Begin, in two respects.

Primarily in his insistence on creating a discourse and a narrative through an adherence to ideology and symbols, and secondly in his resurrection of a restrictive policy-environment, which directly ignores and marginalizes the voices of those outside of a community of *security experts*. In this first respect, Netanyahu has sewn a series of political images into a narrative which positions Iran as the prime existential threat facing the Jewish

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<sup>103</sup>Shilon, A. *Menachem Begin*, 343

<sup>104</sup>Brownstein, Lewis. "Decision Making in Israeli Foreign Policy: An Unplanned Process." *Political Science Quarterly* (1977): 275.

<sup>105</sup>Brownstein, Lewis. "Decision Making in Israeli Foreign Policy: An Unplanned Process.":275

people today. Much in the same way Begin cast Saddam as a “reincarnation of Hitler”, so too has Netanyahu, attached the imagery of the holocaust to the Iranian nuclear threat, and thus the obligation of the Israeli people to collectively remember and prevent another holocaust to the prevention of Iran from building a bomb<sup>106</sup>.

In his response to former Iranian PM Mahmoud Ahmedinajad’s calls to “wipe Israel off of the Map in October 2005, Netanyahu has responded with symbols and imaginaries, just as Begin had. One of the most striking examples of such rests in Netanyahu’s delivery of a speech at Yad Vashem on April 19<sup>th</sup> 2012 on the infamous day of remembrance for Jewish audiences throughout the world. This speech, in the words of Israeli journalist Ben Caspit “left nothing up to the imagination”, and boldly identified Iran as “an existential threat to the State of Israel and also to the rest of the world”, which “...above all is our [Israel’s] obligation” to confront<sup>107</sup>. This speech invoked comparisons to Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement of the Nazi’s and the potentially high cost of the international community today failing to acknowledge the threat of a nuclear Iran, in stating very directly that “...Those who dismiss the Iranian threat as a whim or an exaggeration have learnt nothing from the Holocaust”<sup>108</sup>.

What these references and symbols represent is the attempt to create a narrative which like Begin’s in 1982, demands that the Israeli public surrender complacently to its prescription for future action; preemptive attack. This debate however starkly differs from that conducted in the early 1980s, in that the Israeli politicians, ex-heads of military intelligence and security prevented from entering the internal security community in charge of debating the salience of a preemptive strike, are not in such a position today. While in the time of Osiraq there was both a lacking level of “independent ‘think tanks’ or councils

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<sup>106</sup>Caspit, Ben. “Left nothing to the imagination”. *Ma’ariv Newspaper*. 04/12/2012. Web.

<sup>107</sup>Caspit, Ben. “Left nothing to the imagination”.. 04/12/2012.Web

<sup>108</sup>Caspit, Ben. “Left nothing to the imagination”. 04/12/2012.Web

where academics and government officials [could] come together to exchange views” and challenge government thinking or policies, today there is no such shortage<sup>109</sup>.

Today we are able to see that empirically there are a new set of circumstances which have allowed for the emergence of a new more public forum where current and former heads of the Israeli security establishment such as current head of the Mossad, Tamir Pardo, and his predecessor, Efraim Halevy, are directly challenging the question of whether Iranian nuclear power truly poses an existential threat to Israel<sup>110</sup>.

### **Dissention of Security Experts in Focus**

Pardo and Halevy are two figures within an expansive community of actors within the community of security experts in Israel whom have emerged to challenge Netanyahu’s construction of a narrative around the Iranian nuclear threat. What these actors have accomplished in conjunction with former heads of the Mossad and Shin Bet in Israel, such as Meir Dagan, Yuval Diskin, and Efraim Halevi, is a drastic reconceptualization of the restrictive shape of debates concerning Israel’s security. Dagan, for example, is quoted by Ha’aretz as having stated that Netanyahu’s proposed attack on Iran would be a “foolish” decision, which could have disastorous regional consequences for Israel<sup>111</sup>.

Both Dagan and Efraim Halevy elaborated on their criticism of Netanyahu’s insistence on the need to bomb Iran to prevent the emergence of an existential threat to the Jewish people, stating that “sabotage and diplomacy have done much to set back Iran’s nuclear ambitions and can do more yet”<sup>112</sup>. Dagan elaborated on such in the summer of 2012 saying more specifically that “when I was in office, [former Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) director Yuval] Diskin, Ashkenazi and I could block any dangerous adventure.

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<sup>109</sup> Brownstein, L. "Decision Making in Israeli Foreign Policy: An Unplanned Process," 275.

<sup>110</sup> Feldman et al. “What to Do about Nuclearizing Iran?”*The Israeli Debate Crown Center for Middle East Studies* 59 (2012 : 59): 1

<sup>111</sup> Feldman et al. “What to Do about Nuclearizing Iran?,” 2

<sup>112</sup>Feldman et al. “What to Do about Nuclearizing Iran?,”: 2

Now I am afraid that there is no one to stop Bibi [Netanyahu] and Barak”<sup>113</sup>. Dagan’s statements in this sense reflect a high degree of realism in terms of the need to confront one of the elements, which allowed Begin to bomb Osiraq in 1982, in terms of the ability of the Israeli prime minister and Defense minister to decide on foreign policy free of external challenges.

Dagan’s criticisms have been furthered by former head of the Shin Bet Yuval Diskin, who stated poignantly that Netanyahu is a leader both “possessed by Iran,” as well as by his own reckless perceptions of what the possibility of an Iranian threat means for Israel’s security in the region. Diskin on several occasions even compared Netanyahu to Begin, stating that “when it comes to Iran, Netanyahu is possessed by Menachem Begin, who attacked Iraq’s nuclear reactor” in that it is Netanyahu’s legacy versus the country’s “national interest”<sup>114</sup>. What these comments allude to, is both the idea that Netanyahu, much like Begin, has allowed for calculations of his legacy to overtake considerations of Israel’s national interest, and that Netanyahu’s term has reflected, more than anything, the presence of a “crisis of leadership, values and total contempt for the public”<sup>115</sup>.

Dissent has not, however, been restricted to only ex-military or intelligence heads, and has spread to many Israeli civilian media outlets, think tanks, civil society organizations and NGOs. A prime example of such dissent rests in the form of scientific reports on Iran’s actual nuclear capabilities, mass protests and public opinion polls<sup>116</sup>. Social movements, such as the *IsraellovesIran* and *One Jerusalem* projects, have emerged to reveal the lack of hatred and disdain between the two populations, and instead raise the more existentially threatening possibility of what if ‘we’ Israelis are like ‘them’ Iranians?<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Zanotti, Jim et al. “Israel: Possible Military Strike Against Iran’s Nuclear Facilities” *Congressional Research Service : CRS Report Series* (2012) : 26

<sup>114</sup>J Post Staff. “Diskin: Netanyahu unreliable, 'possessed' by Iran”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 01/04/2013. Web.

<sup>115</sup>J Post Staff. “Diskin: Netanyahu unreliable, 'possessed' by Iran”. *The Jerusalem Post*. Web

<sup>116</sup>Ben Meir, Yehuda “The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran” *INSS* (2013): 232

<sup>117</sup>Even, Dan. “Hundreds of Israelis petition IDF pilots: Refuse orders to bomb Iran”. *Ha'aretz Newspaper*. 08/16/2012. Web.

Further cases of such dissention can be found in the varying petitions signed by IDF pilots and commanders, stating that they will not participate in a preemptive military strike of the Iranian reactors<sup>118</sup>.

Israeli academic Zaki Shalom argues that these dissenters expressing opposition to Netanyahu's Iranian threat narrative aim to critically question the validity of the Begin doctrine or references to the precedent of the Osiraq raid. These dissenters suggest, conversely, that Israel is in quite a different position today than it was in 1982:<sup>119</sup> Israel is neither as isolated as it was in 1982, nor does it require a monopoly over nuclear capability as Begin insisted in his Never Again narrative.

Despite some of the obvious similarities between the two debates, however, it is important to mention that there are a number of structural differences between the two, which further allow for lessons to be drawn today in terms of Israel's response to emerging nuclear programs in the region. Primarily, while Iraq's weapon program in the mid and late 1970s was in its infant or "research" stage, the Iranian nuclear program is quite advanced. In Iran today, there exist not one but several "main nuclear facilities", as well as, "fuelling facilities."<sup>120</sup> These facilities, such as those in Natanz, Bushehr, Isfahan, Arak and Fordow, make the Iranian program a more complex target for a pre-emptive strike. While Osiraq was a single, aboveground light-reactor facility, the dispersed and complex infrastructure of Iranian nuclear capabilities has largely eliminated the possibility of a "surgical strike" which could eliminate such facilities<sup>121</sup>.

Bennett Ramberg highlights this consideration, arguing that given the advanced nature of today's Iranian nuclear program, an airstrike would not accomplish the goal

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<sup>118</sup>"A Bridge of Communication Between the People in the Middle East : Peace Factory". Israel Loves Iran, accessed on 03/01/13 from: <http://www.israelovesiran.com>.

<sup>119</sup>Shalom, Zaki. "The Debate on a Military Option against Iran Revisited: When and By Whom?" *INSS Insight* 446 (2013) : 1

<sup>120</sup>Braut-Hegghammer, Malfrid. "Attacks on Nuclear Infrastructure: Opening Pandora's Box?." *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*(October 2011) : 3

<sup>121</sup>Zanotti, Jim et al. "Israel: Possible Military Strike Against Iran's Nuclear Facilities" *Congressional Research Service : CRS Report Series* (2012) : 26

achieved through the Osiraq bombing, in that it would only mildly delay its progress, but neither affect its ability nor determination to produce a nuclear weapon<sup>122</sup>. These considerations are often coupled with the argument put forth by varying Israeli academics and ex-heads of intelligence that the attempt to temporarily thwart Iran's nuclear capabilities in the same manner as the Osiraq mission, through pre-emptive bombing, may actually drive its program deeper underground, to the point of immunity from air attack. In this way, a pre-emptive attack holds more potential negative consequences than it does benefits, in having the distinct ability to "push Iran's efforts to re-double their efforts and go nuclear"<sup>123</sup>.

Hence, taboos against public and non-military involvement in security debates in Israel are changing rapidly. While there is an acute difference in the structural realities Begin faced at Osiraq and those that Netanyahu faces today on Iran, the most important element, in terms of the ability of preemptive bombings to hasten the efforts of Israel's nuclear rivals in the region, are today immediately clear.

Netanyahu's disregard for this lesson, coupled with the reality that Saddam Hussein's nuclear program in 1982 was no more a threat to Israel than its own military, in many ways substantiates Yuval Diskin's assessment of Netanyahu as a reckless leader. Further, Netanyahu has largely ignored the calls from both within his own Cabinet as well as those in the Israeli population, many of which were at one point equally tasked with similar decisions. Ze'ev Schiff renders a pointed criticism at the overwhelming place of military doctrine and the presence of a restricted community of militarily trained decision makers, as those distinctively tasked with the responsibility of Israel's security. Schiff argues that, given the rapidly changing reality of Israel's surroundings and the rise of an Arab outer circle, in "Iran, Iraq and even Pakistan", its decision-makers need not concern

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<sup>122</sup>Ramberg, Bennett. "Preemption Paradox". *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, (Summer 2006): 51

<sup>123</sup>Ramberg, Bennett. "Preemption Paradox": 51

themselves with the static tenants of an “Israeli military doctrine” which was established in Israel’s distant past<sup>124</sup>.

Schiff is thus arguing that Israel’s strategic surroundings require a re-evaluation and re-constitution of the short term merits offered by such doctrines, in favor of a decision-making process that stresses the need for politicians to engage in the “long-term thinking” needed for national security. The result of such could prospectively be a system, unlike that of Netanyahu or Begin, which stresses the need for a clear separation in those responsible for military decisions, and those responsible for political decisions in deciding matters of Israeli security. In some capacity, the calls of those ex-heads of intelligence and security institutions in Israel to de-escalate the level of rhetoric and discourse are demands to achieve such a separation.

Amir Bar On has suggested the need for a re-conceptualization of civil military relations in Israel to more accurately reflect the separation of responsibilities and power in naming existential threats to Israel’s security and shaping its national security interests.<sup>125</sup> Bar-On argues that, while the national political leadership is tasked with determining the “nature, scope, and framework of the national defense system, as well as its political and military objectives” it is ultimately the responsibility of civil leadership to plan and implement “a national security”, mainly “because it reflects their beliefs and perceptions of reality which in turn guide their political and strategic decisions”<sup>126</sup>. Without a clear separation of the two, there is the risk that the army and military experts gain the distinct ability to influence the role that military doctrine can play in decisions with long-term political and civil consequences, and become an undistinguishable part of the state.

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<sup>124</sup>Schiff, Ze’ev. “Old Security Perception in New Reality”. *Haaretz Online*. 01/09/ 1998. Web.

<sup>125</sup> Bar-Or, Amir. "The Need to Re-examine Civil-Military Relations in Israel." *Alle Rechte vorbehalten* (2000): 78.

<sup>126</sup> Bar-Or, Amir. "The Need to Re-examine Civil-Military Relations in Israel": 78

What both the Iranian and Osiraq debates stress is the need to re-establish the separation that David Ben Gurion, one of the founders of the modern Israeli state, stressed in terms of “the army [being] unconditionally subordinate to the government and its control thus becoming “the sole responsibility of the civilian authorities who form the government, the Knesset, and the voters”<sup>127</sup>. In re-establishing such a demarcation between these two echelons of decision-making and thereby creating the space for a public debate to ensue, there emerges a new set of questions and answers concerning the threat which Iran truly poses to the state of Israel. As suggested earlier through the work of *IranlovesIsrael*, the more potent threat that Iran poses to Israel is not in how different it is, but instead how potentially similar it is, in being one of the only other non-Arab, nuclear powers in the Middle East. Dagan and Diskin’s counter-discourse have stressed the idea that the urgency and character of Netanyahu’s comments demonstrate that the leader took on a personal obsession with this issue, rather than trying to establish the objective facts of what a nuclear Iran really means for Israel’s security.

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<sup>127</sup> Bar-Or, Amir. "The Need to Re-examine Civil-Military Relations in Israel": 78

#### SECTION 4: CRITICAL SECURITY STUDIES AND THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR DEBATE

This section explores the meaning of Securitization and Desecuritization within the case study chosen, and analyzes how the empirics of this analysis lend themselves to exemplifying an instance of Desecuritization.

##### IDENTIFYING ESCALATIONS IN DISCOURSE: SPEECH ACT THEORY

One of the most useful starting points for any analysis attempting to use speech act theory, was Mark B. Salter and Can E. Mutlu's text "Research Methods in Critical Security Studies"<sup>128</sup>. It provided this analysis with several important theoretical tools through which to practically identify the process of securitization and the discursive techniques which enable speech acts. More than any chapter, Juha A Vuori's section and case on the People's Republic of China was one of the most useful parts of the book, in its providing a simple and straightforward methodology as to how to practically conduct a critical discourse analysis with an extended focus on securitizing moves. Vuori's imploring "identity frame theory" which states that "familiar interpretative schemas (frames)" are used by specific actors to "attach meaning" and underlying stories "to events and experiences", was an important tool for this analysis<sup>129</sup>. Vuori's separated the leadership of the PRC into three eras granting each era with an evaluation of whether it exemplified a "success or failure" of the "politics" implied in securitization, as a *process*<sup>130</sup>.

Furthermore, Vuori looked to the case of China as demonstrating spectacular instances of securitization at certain junctures, yet maintains nonetheless that the most crucial empirical feature of studying securitization, is the fact that its symbols, actors, and

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<sup>128</sup>Vuori, Juha Chapter 22 : Speech Act Theory in Salter, Mark B. & Mutlu, Can E. *Research Methods in Critical Security Studies* (New York : Routledge) : 128

<sup>129</sup>Snow, David A. & Benford, Robert D. "Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization." *International Social Movement Research*,1 (1988): 197-218.

<sup>130</sup>Vuori, Juha. "Critical Security and Chinese Politics: The Anti-falungong Campaign". Routledge (2013.): 135

practices can change<sup>131</sup>. For example Vuori's study contrasts the Maoist era with the Post-Maoist eras of PRC, and finds that while securitization was used in the former era to "mobilize society" against multiple threats within China's borders, it was used within the latter era to "suppress autonomous mobilization in society". The differing functions for securitization in different eras demonstrates the theoretical invalidity of defining as a concept which has definitive moments of acceptance or rejection, and therefore Vuori's study provided a theoretical illustration of this idea. What this understanding and implied methodology of securitization further offered this analysis was a way to use securitization to study multiple audiences, such as the presence of Dominant and dissenting security experts, as well as, the simultaneous acceptance and rejection of an issue as securitized. The tool used in this analysis to identify escalations in securitized discourse was therefore quite similar to Vuori's in terms of the identification of securitized discourse around "moments" or specific junctures in time where, for example, political crisis or change is occurring. In the same vein, this analysis looked to identify the consistency and continuity of security discourse on nuclear-Iran through focusing on extended moments where the same language is used by the same actors, Case in point is Ehud Barak's insertion of the terms "zone of immunity" and "window of opportunity" into the Dominant discourse in May 2012 at an annual "Security Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century".

In the aftermath of Netanyahu and Barak qualifying this symbol and the Iranian threat in a nearly identical style, captions riddled the media concerning Iran's connection to emerging regional threats such as "Syria", "Hezbollah", and "Chemical Weapons". More important than the construction of the Iranian threat as occupying dimensions which exceed its territory, was the use of securitizing moves to demonstrate Israel's "readiness to attack Iran", via the issuing of statements by security experts and the political elite about "the need to attack Iran before letting it go nuclear", Israel's military option against

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<sup>131</sup>Vuori, Juha. "Critical Security and Chinese Politics: The Anti-falungong Campaign,"135

Iran being “on the table”, and Israel’s upcoming Austere Challenge joint-missile defense exercise with the United States. This type of immediate escalation is apparent within several junctures throughout the 2011-12 sample and lends itself to a similar methodological focus to Vuori’s study in highlighting the ability of a securitizing discourse to fade and re-enter the public’s consciousness at different points in time. While Vuori’s dominant unit of analysis in explaining this phenomenon was the political aims or interests of the manipulator, or in his case the political elite, this study looks more simply at identifying specific instance in which the use of securitizing discourse by one dominant set of actors, was met by an unprecedented level of challenge and rejection. What this focus leads to is the adoption of a modified understanding of securitization, as articulated in the work of Mark B. Salter.

#### SECURITIZATION, SECURITIZING MOVES & SPEECH ACT THEORY: DEFINITION AND CHALLENGES

One of the most central concepts within Critical Security Studies(CSS) is the use of a “speech act” through which to understand the utterance of security as a concept involving language as well as performance. Huysmans (year) highlights the importance of studying speech acts through emphasizing the terms unique reference to “the political investment” of performing an “act” rather than simply uttering “speech”. What Huysmans is referring to when he points to the political investment of a speech act as making it terminologically different and unique from language or speech, is the idea that they “creates a scene in which actors and things are brought into a relation that challenges a given way of doing things”. Central to this understanding of speech acts and their ability to enact new spaces, actors and social meanings, is the idea that security invites a particular language and more importantly

a particular type of politics, which are characterized by exception or a break from “routinized practices”<sup>132</sup>.

In making this argument Huysmans (year) uses the term “rupture” to help explain the idea that speech acts essentially involve the creation of “boundary conditions, however infinitesimal and momentary, through enacting limits of a given order”, which traditionally attempt to jump to the realm of exceptionality and threat. More simply put speech acts erect boundaries concerning the parameters of decision-making and authority. In this way, speech acts are able to *do* a great deal in the sense that they primarily imply the need to break from the current social or political order, in insisting on “the existing normative order[’s]” inability to “cope with an existentially threatening situation”, and secondly insist on the need to “enact new possibilities of what is right and wrong”. This explanation of speech acts essentially related the concept of an “act” to “moments of political gravity and a split between political exceptionality and normality”, a political condition needed for an actor to securitize an issue.

A straightforward example of a speech act is provided by CSS scholar Matt Macdonald and his identifying a “wedding” as a social institution at which the act of “I do” at a “...particular moment, in a particular context creates the marriage itself...”<sup>133</sup>. As Macdonald points out, the essence of what makes a speech act a unique performative process, is its being a “form of representation” which depicts a “view of external reality” but more importantly enacts a specific performance. Securitization theory made the theoretical transition to “repositioning” these terms within the definition of “securitizing moves”, understood similarly as an “actor’s attempt to construct an issue as an existential

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<sup>132</sup>Huysmans, Jef. "What's in an act? On security speech acts and little security nothings." *Security Dialogue* 42.4-5 (2011): 374

<sup>133</sup>McDonald, M. “Constructivisms” in Williams, Paul D., ed. *Security Studies: an introduction*. (London : Routledge, 2012) : 73

threat to a particular group using a speech act”<sup>134</sup>. The case study chosen is full of incomplete attempts at these performatives, However where this analysis differs from other CSS discourse projects is its suggestion in reinterpreting its definition.

#### DEFINING SECURITIZATION IN THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR DEBATE: A THEORETICAL CHALLENGE

Qualifying the theoretical concepts of securitization, and the politics that define it as a process within the case study chosen entails looking more closely at the arguments of Mark Salter and Thierry Balzacq, who suggest that securitization is “an iterative, political process”<sup>135</sup>, which can contain multiple speakers and multiple audiences. When we read Salter’s definition of securitization, it is possible to observe its conceptual distance, as well as, similarity to the definition articulated by Ole Waever and Barry Buzan, the pioneers of the concept. Buzan and Waever’s definition of “securitization” takes speech act theory as its point of departure, stressing the logic that by merely uttering the word security, and thereby “labeling something a security issue”, an issue takes on the shape and logic implied in issues of security<sup>136</sup>. Salter’s definition takes the same premise as its starting point, however, it is unique in its more flexible and fluid understanding of the concepts of “audience” and “acceptance” entailed within the process of securitization.

These concepts capture a crucial analytical feature of the CSS approach in its establishing the logic that all issues of *security* begin and end with an actor’s initiation of a “securitizing move”, which permits the lifting of an issue from the realm of *normal* political

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<sup>134</sup> McDonald, M. “Constructivism,” 374

<sup>135</sup> Salter, Mark B. “Securitization and Desecuritization : a dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Authority”. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 11 (2008): 335 & Balzacq, Thierry (2005) “The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context” *European Journal of International Relations* 11(2): 61

<sup>136</sup> Taureck, Rita “Securitisation theory – The Story so far: Theoretical Inheritance and What it Means to be a Post-Structural Realist”. *University of Tartu* ( 2006): 8

decision-making and debate, to be placed in the realm of *emergency* politics<sup>137</sup>. It is widely held within CSS that performing a security speech act, involves the making of a series of choices which are “explicitly political”, in that “speaking security” involves enacting a certain political space not bound by normal political rules and routines<sup>138</sup>. Balzacq, as well as Salter, argue that securitization is more accurately an “iterative political process”, birthed out of the inter-subjective “interaction between securitising actor and audience”<sup>139</sup>. From this perspective, the process of securitization is more fluid in its life cycle, in that it can begin and end without reducing its success or failure to an instantaneous moment of acceptance. Such a moment is rarely identifiable. What is more clearly observed is the emergence of dynamics of support or opposition towards the attempted securitization of this issue, within multiple audiences. Hence, securitization theory must acknowledge the profoundly different roles that “security plays” to “different audiences”. We must “expand our analysis of how securitizing moves are accepted or rejected”<sup>140</sup>.

Salter’s demand to expand our understanding of securitization is particularly relevant to the case of the Iranian nuclear issue primarily because of the methodological difficulty in identifying whether a particular understanding of the issue has been successfully accepted by a single or multiple audiences<sup>141</sup>. What logically follows from such an approach is identifying how the case study exemplifies a shift in the most dominant political characteristics present within the process of securitization, in terms of the *politics of exception*, as well as, the *politics of consent*<sup>142</sup>. The politics of exception can be understood as

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<sup>137</sup> Salter, Mark B. “Securitization and Desecuritization : a dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Authority,”338

<sup>138</sup> Salter, Mark B. “Securitization and Desecuritization : a dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Authority,”335

<sup>139</sup> Taureck, Rita “Securitisation theory – The Story so far: Theoretical Inheritance and What it Means to be a Post-Structural Realist,”11

<sup>140</sup> Salter, Mark B. “Securitization and Desecuritization : a dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Authority,”322

<sup>141</sup> Peoples, Columba & Vaughan-Williams, Nick *Critical Security Studies : An Introduction*. (New York : Routledge, 2010):83

<sup>142</sup> Salter, Mark B. “Securitization and Desecuritization : a dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Authority,” 336

the political environment preceding an issue's successful securitization. They are premised on a logic of exception and emergency, short-term thinking, "extraordinary defensive moves" and the "breaking of normal political rules". Conversely, the politics of consent are characterized by a political environment of slow, deliberative, and long-term decision making. Securitization is transformative: a securitized issue is forced into the realm of exceptionalism, where security logics become the central guiding principles within a given social context. When applied to the case of Israel, the contrasting politics of consent and exception prove to be powerful analytical tools, providing "relational understanding" of the normalcy of democratic procedural politics and the "exceptionalism of securitization"<sup>143</sup>.

In the context of a liberal democracy such as Israel, what is more easily locatable is an attempt by the Netanyahu administration and his supporting community of "security experts" to break free of the normal procedures and rules of democratic planning and debate, in order to escape to the domain of rapid emergency-style decision making. Such a case easily fits with Salter and Balzacq's definition. There have been numerous attempts to jump into the realm of politics characterized by enmity, fear and exception that underlie an issue's successful securitization. However, such attempts have not lead to the issue's indefinite securitization. It has instead remained within the realm of debate and normal politics. Therefore what can be established at this point is the need to adopt an understanding of securitization, which readily recognizes the importance of a fundamental shift in the underlying politics that characterizes how an issue is understood as one of security, and dealt with accordingly.

It is clear that the dynamics of unsuccessful securitization are at play in the case of the Iranian nuclear threat in Israel due to the on-going attempts to deny the dominant conceptualization of Iran as an existential threat to Israel. The Iranian threat remains

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<sup>143</sup>Aradau, Claudia. "Security and the Democratic Scene: Desecuritization and Emancipation". *Journal of International Relations and Development*. 7(2004): 392

contested between two groups. One group possesses what Holger Stritzel calls “positional power” relative to the actors or audience of the securitization<sup>144</sup>. “Positional power” refers to the primacy of the relationship between different political groups, in considering the “extent to which one actor has the power to make a threat” and “the discursive weight of that threat”<sup>145</sup>. A useful theoretical supplement to Balzacq and Salter’s more flexible understanding is an understanding of how discourses are crucial vehicles that allow for an issue to become more deeply accepted as one belonging within the *politics of exception*, or its resistance and its remaining within the sphere of *political contestation*.

## **SECTION 5: MAIN FINDINGS & ANALYSIS**

This section will analyze and extrapolate the central findings of this analysis, mainly focusing on the prevalence of discursive strategies found within critical discourse theory, such as the use of discursive manipulation, qualification of security expertise, and framing. This section will further expand on the shifts in public opinion during the months analyzed throughout 2011 & 2012, with specific attention paid to shifts in Israeli public opinion and the presence of dissent during key moments throughout the debate. These findings contribute towards the central conclusion of this analysis in terms of the influence of discourse on the ability of dominant & Dissenting camps to participate in the contestation of security issues traditionally conceptualized as impervious to public debate in Israel.

### **FINDING 1: DISCURSIVE MANIPULATION AND FRAMING IN THE DISCURSIVE PROJECTIONS ON THE IRANIAN THREAT.**

During the months in which data was gathered (January 2011-November 2012) the Netanyahu administration and its supporting apparatus of Security Experts, utilized the

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<sup>144</sup> Salter, Mark B. “Securitization and Desecuritization : a dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Authority,” 326

<sup>145</sup> Salter, Mark B. “Securitization and Desecuritization : a dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Authority,” 326

aforementioned strategies of discursive manipulation and framing to underscore the imminence and existential character of the Iranian nuclear threat. This study observed that consistently throughout the period of analysis the Dominant Camp specific speeches, interviews or public addresses Netanyahu attempted to insert a language of Self and other with regards to the “prevention” of a nuclear Iran.

This finding is supported by one of the dominant findings in Adam Klein’s study of Israeli media sources during 2007 was “...that Ynetnews’ framing of Islamism was most commonly tied to a *militant/extremist frame* that linked the radical actions of groups like Hezbollah with an Islamic identity” to Iran & Palestinian groups respectively<sup>146</sup>. Such a trend is identifiable within the data sample chosen in that Iran was constructed and framed by the Dominant camp, as a threat with intimate ties to other various regional threats. Prime examples of this strategy include the linking of “Iran’s long arm” in trafficking weapons to Hezbollah’s, Syria, the Palestinians and Lebanon, as well as, its ability to strike Israeli civilian and diplomatic targets throughout the world in February 2012<sup>147</sup>. In this month, the media acted a central location through which Netanyahu and his community of security experts could frame Iran as a threat which does not only pose imminent danger to Israel, via its possession of nuclear capabilities, but more so one that has taken on dimensions not limited by territory or geography. Case in point are the innumerable headlines referring to “Iranian spies” being caught by Israeli intelligence forces, “Iranian terrorist plots” foiled, Iran “not playing by the rules of the game”, and most importantly Israel’s level of military preparedness to act “...when the moment comes”<sup>148</sup>. What this type of language stressed more than anything else was, one of the crucial conditions of a securitizing move, in terms of the need to establish a storyline or “plot” around the elimination of the existential threat

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<sup>146</sup> Klein, A. “Characterizing ‘the Enemy’: Zionism and Islamism in the Iranian and Israeli Press”. *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2 (2009): 389

<sup>147</sup> See “February 2012” in *Appendix 3: Dominance & Counter-Discourse 2012*

<sup>148</sup> See “February 2012” in *Appendix 3: Dominance & Counter-Discourse 2012*

being proposed by the actor or actors in “a position of authority”<sup>149</sup>.

Van Dijk discusses the strategy of discursive manipulation in the context of political power and the ability of political elites to establish dominance and power over the audiences they are wishing to manipulate within the mass public. Primarily Van Dijk draws attention to the difference between manipulation and persuasion, in that the former most importantly involves the establishment of a unique dynamic between the manipulator, “exercising control over people (against will or best interests)”, and the person or audience being manipulated. For Van Dijk what makes manipulation both a powerful and somewhat “illegitimate” discursive strategy its involving “the abuse” and “domination” of power and authority. In the case of the Iranian nuclear debate in Israel, this not only meant Netanyahu abusing his position as Prime Minister to deliver speeches, which the whole nation would inevitably have to witness, but more importantly involved the permanent establishment of a “mental model” through such speeches which allowed him direct and indirect controls over the actions of those paying witness to such speeches. In simpler terms, Van Dijk identifies as the most central quality to manipulation, the ability of the manipulator to create “more general and abstract beliefs” such as knowledge attitudes and ideologies.<sup>150</sup>

The qualification of this feature in terms of establishing the existential threat in terms of “conditions historically associated with a threat”<sup>151</sup> is empirically exemplified in Feb 2012 by the multiple suggestions by Israeli security experts of the possibility of Iran leading a “regional war” and a “wave of terror” against its people. The linguistic references which strengthen this plot are endless, however, in the specific month being references they include, yet were not limited to terms such as “terror/ist”, “Bombing of Israeli civilians and diplomats”, “cold war between two powers”, “sanctions not working”, “all options on the

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<sup>149</sup>Taureck, Rita. “Securitisation theory – The Story so far: Theoretical Inheritance and What it Means to be a Post-Structural Realist”. *University of Tartu* (2006): 8

<sup>150</sup>Van Dijk, Teun A. "Discourse and manipulation." *Discourse & Society* 17.3 (2006): 359-383

<sup>151</sup>Van Dijk, Teun A. "Discourse and manipulation,": 8

table” and “Iranian Quom Force”<sup>152</sup>. In the context of linguistic associations, which are as potent as these, there is in the words of Israeli journalist Ben Caspit, “noting left to the imagination” in terms of defining the scope or importance of the Iranian nuclear threat<sup>153</sup>. Despite being able to identify a clear escalation in the level of dominant discourse in February 2012, security experts and political elites such as Vice Prime Minister Moshe Ya’alon implored such a strategy, in casting the Iranian the threat as close to home as possible, as early as January 2011. It was at this time that Ya’alon with the help of Defense Minister Ehud Barak, tried to frame the Iranian threat in terms of its ties to Hezbollah and Iran’s” training of Palestinian terrorists” within the occupied territories<sup>154</sup>. In combining expert knowledge from both the security and political realms, these two actors essentially tied escalations of rocket attacks along the Israeli border, to Iranian interests in both Lebanon and the West Bank.

In this sense one of the most important findings of this study is the effect which this rhetoric and association is able to have in that as Waever and linguistic theorist John Austin have argued, these points of reference and associations make it increasingly “more likely for one to conjure a security threat “<sup>155</sup>. As is demonstrated within the period of study for this analysis, this logic of including a plot was absolutely central to Netanyahu’s dominant camp of security experts, politicians and public figures’ ability to steer the public towards placing Iran within a larger frame of militant/extremist.

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<sup>152</sup>Yehoshua, Yossi et al. ,Katz, Yaakov & Keinon, Herb. , Harel, Amos. “An Israeli warning, Syrian civil war boosts Israeli-US defense ties”, “PM: Israel may have to act to keep Syrian chemical weapons out of wrong hands”, “Barak: Israel may seize advanced weapons in Syria, Barak: Assad's fall closer than ever”. *Yedioth Achronoth, The Jerusalem Post, Ha'aretz*. 07/23/2012. Web.

<sup>153</sup>Caspit, Ben. “Left nothing to the imagination”. *Ma'ariv Newspaper*. 04/19/2012. Web.

<sup>154</sup>Eichner, Itamar. ,Katz, Yaakov. “Israeli Officials Fear that Hizbullah will Heat up the Sector” & “Israel Needs to be Concerned”. *Yedioth Achronoth & The Jerusalem Post*.01/13/11.Web.

<sup>155</sup>Taureck, Rita. “Securitisation theory – The Story so far: Theoretical Inheritance and What it Means to be a Post-Structural Realist”. *University of Tartu* ( 2006): 10

## FINDING 2: PREVALENCE OF SPEECH ACTS OR SECURITIZING MOVES BY DOMINANT ACTORS

During the period of the sample several key words were selected to demonstrate the use of the CSS concept of a speech act. Central to the arguments of this analysis has been the presence of the concept of a Dominant camp of actors framing and discursively constructing the Iranian nuclear threat using strategies such as framing, “discursive manipulation”, and the staging of various speech acts or securitizing moves. As Jef Huysman’s has argued previously in relation to how the concept of security framing shifts the focus of critical discourse analysis to encompass “not what the consequences are of expanding threat definition... but how policy problems are made intelligible as an object of government by applying security knowledge to them”<sup>156</sup>. The identification of key words and word-pairings such as: “attack”, “Iran” , “existential threat”, “nuclear holocaust”, “regional war”, “nuclear threat”, was one of the key indicators of the Netanyahu government’s attempted securitization of the Iranian nuclear issue. These key words all appeared over one hundred and fifty times in the two year period studied, however, more significant than this is the fact that these words appeared most frequently in months where “drills”, military announcements and disaster scenarios were held to signify Israel’s readiness for the possibility of military confrontation with Iran. To substantiate securitization theory’s central concept of a speech act, these linguistic associations were never offered on their own to substantiate the existential character of the Iranian nuclear threat, but were always paired with some form of act to demonstrate the urgency, and necessity of the exceptionalism granted to issues of national security. One key demonstration of this is in the month of August 2012, where the term existential threat or threat to Israel’s existence appear twenty times in reference to Iran. These linguistic terms are paired with speeches by IDF Chiefs of Staff, Home Front Defense Minister, State Comptroller and various Security experts insuring “Israel’s readiness for a multi-front war”,

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<sup>156</sup>Huysmans, Jef. *The politics of insecurity: Fear, migration and asylum in the EU*.

(London: Routledge, 2006): 22

or the need to begin advanced “preparations” for the possibility of a “regional war with Iran”<sup>157</sup> At several points leading up to the United States 2012 elections, these security experts began to prepare statements on the ability to lower casualties in the event of a regional war. These attempts at linguistically exercising what Huysmans terms *security framing* garnering feelings of insecurity within the public, were then strategically paired with acts, such as Israel’s testing of its Magic Wand anti-ballistic missile system and upgrades made to its anti-ballistic missile program<sup>158</sup>. These measures demonstrate the dynamics of securitization at work, in exhibiting the practice of speech act and security framing instructive to its presence, however more interestingly are the challenges risen within the political community of dissenters whom reject its implications.

### FINDING 3: INFLUENCE OF SECURITY EXPERTISE IN LEGITIMIZING DOMINANT & DISSENTING DISCOURSES

As CSS Scholar Boswell argues the overwhelming presence of security experts within positions of political power or authority, in almost all instances, lead to a democracy’s “reliance on expert knowledge” as a prime “resource of legitimacy”<sup>159</sup>. This has been the overwhelming case in the two-year period of analysis explored through this work, in that such “expert knowledge” has come to possess a central position within Netanyahu’s attempt to cast the Iranian nuclear issue within existentially threatening terms, as well as the ability of dissention to take hold within Israel’s security experts. Empirically we are able to see a demonstration of the ability of security experts and security communities to influence the opinions of the public through looking towards moments where war appeared imminent and observing the linguistic space which was enacted to both create and contest the threat. Case in point are September 2011 & August 2012, where the statements of security experts within separate camps of Dominant and Dissenting actors appeared to emerge in what can

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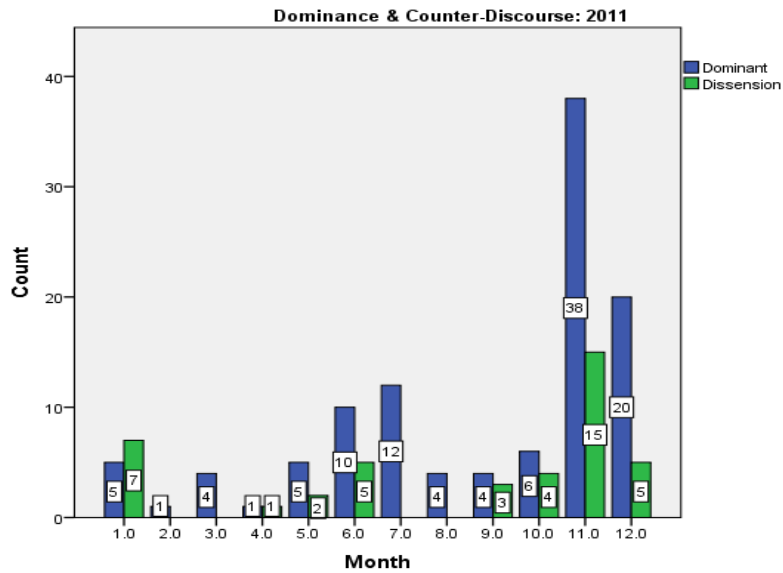
<sup>157</sup>Mualem, Mazal. “Netanyahu Plays the Iran Card in Israeli Politics”. *Al-Monitor*. 26/11/2013. Web.

<sup>158</sup>Yehoshua, Yossi. “Iron Dome will provide protection—but not for civilians”. *Yedioth Achronoth*. 08/13/12. Web

<sup>159</sup>Boswell, Christina. “The political uses of expert knowledge: immigration policy and social research”. (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2009) :197

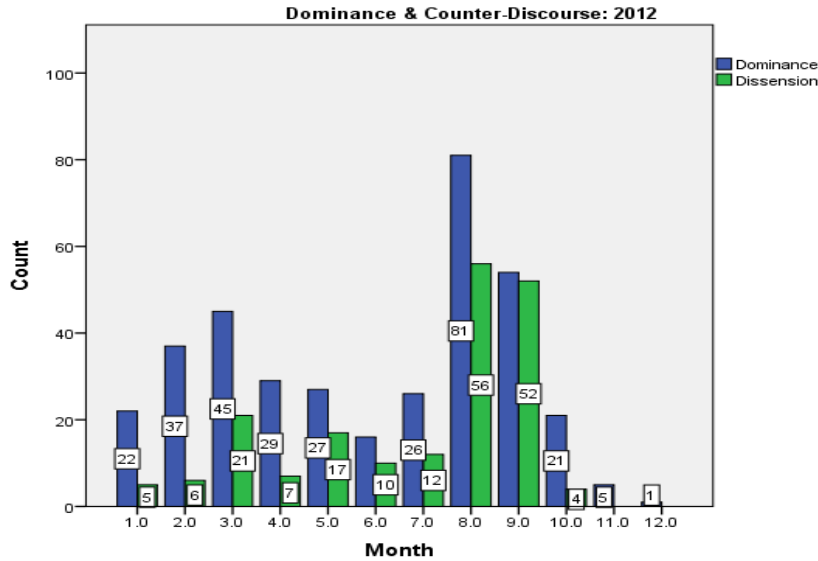
be termed a “political spectacle” or the “publicized process of seeking and contesting legitimacy<sup>160</sup>. What this finding substantiates is the importance of security communities, as a key body of experts, which are able to legitimate both dominant and dissenting bodies of discourse in instances of public debate.

*Figure 1: Dominant & Dissenting Discourses 2011*



*Figure 2: Dominant & Dissenting Discourse 2012*

<sup>160</sup> Huysmans, Jef. *The politics of insecurity: Fear, migration and asylum in the EU*. (London: Routledge, 2006) : 153



This space contained many of the characteristics discussed by Bigo and Huysmans in terms of containing routinized practices of collecting statistics, constructing and using new technologies and generating “a field” in which a monopoly is claimed over “the legitimate knowledge on what constitutes legitimate unease” or a “real risk”<sup>161</sup>. As Boswell has argued the overwhelming presence of these actors within positions of political power or authority, in almost all instances, lead to a democracy’s “reliance on expert knowledge” as a prime “resource of legitimacy”. This has been the overwhelming case in the two-year period of analysis explored through this work, in that such “expert knowledge” has come to possess a central position within Netanyahu’s attempt to cast the Iranian nuclear issue within existentially threatening terms. This community, which is composed of current and former members of Israel’s security<sup>162</sup> or intelligence institutions, has been utilized to invoke a certain set of politics defined by security studies as the politics of exception, needed for the invocation of emergency-style thinking and decision-making<sup>163</sup>. The

<sup>161</sup> Huysmans, Jef. *The politics of insecurity: Fear, migration and asylum in the EU* : 153

<sup>162</sup> See See Table 1: *Categorization of Dominant and Dissenting Discourses, Actors, Narratives and Media Sources*

<sup>163</sup> Saltr, Mark B. “Securitization and Desecuritization : a dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Authority”: 325

empirics of this study demonstrate the weekly announcement of security developments, in the form of threat assessments, military drills, weapons acquisitions, military conferences, disaster preparedness scenarios, and threat assessments. What these seemingly minor speech-acts add up to, is the creation of a space in which only those identified as part of the epistemic community of security experts, are named as the ultimate source of knowledge and authority on all issues of security, and thereby granted the power to decide on such matters. In simple terms, the creation of an almost daily system of developments and updates concerning the security of Israel relative the consistently expanding and existentially threatening Iranian nuclear threat allows this community to possess a unique type of authority relative to other political actors within Israel's political apparatus.

While this analysis explores the feature of security experts as an endemic feature of Israel's political culture, this analysis holds, more optimistically that this is neither an inevitable nor permanent feature of Israel's democratic politic. The concept of an Iranian nuclear **debate**, and its ability to block or transform this hierarchical dynamic, is therefore, where this analysis looks to differ from mainstream perscriptions within critical IR theory and securitization theory. As aforementioned, this analysis contends that the case study examined both provides for a clear example of an "attempted securitization", but more importantly contributes to the CSS body of literature exploring the undoing or reconstitution of the linguistic strategies symbols used to qualify an existential threat. In this sense, while looking to identify and point to an example of securitization, its most substantial offering lies in its challenging the permanence of this process and its simplistic shape in containing an instantaneous moment of acceptance or rejection.

FINDING 4: ATTITUDES OF THE ISRAELI PUBLIC TOWARDS THE EXISTENTIAL CHARACTER OF THE IRANIAN THREAT HAVE NOT VARIED A GREAT DEAL OVER TIME, HOWEVER, ATTITUDES TOWARDS ISRAEL'S EXECUTION OF A UNILATERAL STRIKE HAVE CHANGED DRASTICALLY

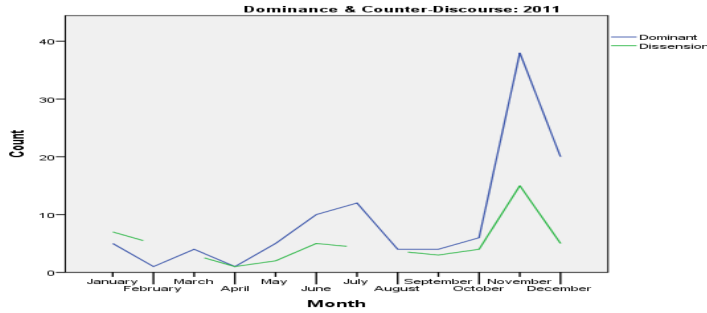
In tracking the progress of popular Israeli perceptions of the Iranian nuclear threat, as measured by public opinion polls, it is clear that despite variations, most Israeli's believe that "A Nuclear-Armed Iran Constitutes an Existential Threat to Israel"<sup>164</sup>. If we look at the progression of public opinion from March 2012-April 2013 it is clear that public perceptions have only slightly changed throughout the period of analysis, in that over 65% of the Israeli population, at least, have consistently replied that they do believe Iran constitutes an existential threat to Israel. Beginning in March 26<sup>th</sup> 2012, the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs(JCPA) Poll shows that 77% of the population replied "yes" to the suggestion of a "nuclear Iran" constituting "an Existential Threat to Israel". This finding is complimented by a survey, conducted by the Israeli Dahaf agency for the University of Maryland in the month of April which found 74% of the Israeli Jewish population to respond "yes" to the same question posed by the JCPA poll<sup>165</sup>.

**Figure 3:** *Public Opinion & Competing Discourses 2011*

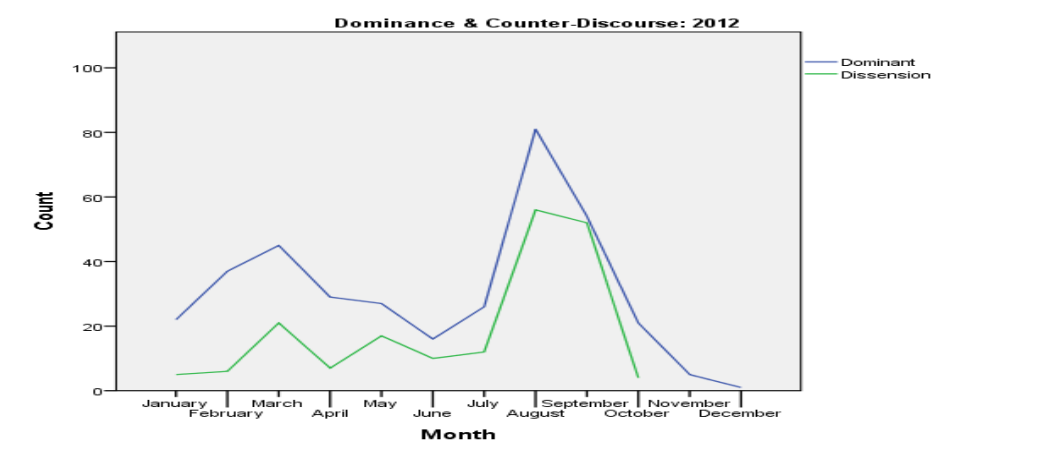
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<sup>164</sup> All information on Israeli poll trends was supported by the web-resources made available by : "Israeli Public Opinion Polls : Attitudes Towards Iran". Jewish Virtual Library, accessed on 01/11/13 from [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society\\_&\\_Culture/ispoiran.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society_&_Culture/ispoiran.html). Web.

<sup>165</sup> "Poll: 77 Percent of Israelis See Iran Nukes as Existential Threat". The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, accessed on 01/22/2013 from: <http://www.imra.org.il/story.php3?id=56200>. Web.



**Figure 4:** Public Opinion & Competing Discourses 2012



If we track this same question, into an identical poll conducted by the Israeli Dahaf agency for the University of Maryland conducted exactly one year later, it is possible to see a great deal of continuity in terms of over 70% of the population supporting the belief that a Nuclear-Armed Iran constitutes “an Existential Threat to Israel”<sup>166</sup>. What this demonstrates is the ability of Netanyahu to utilize the strategies aforementioned in this section concerning manipulation, discourse, and agenda-setting, to reify his ability to control and affect shifts in public support for an attack on Iran.

In other words, if we look towards the responses of Israelis to questions of prescription in terms of what a nuclear Iran means for Israel’s security, a substantial variation in responses inevitably follows. Specifically when Israelis were questioned about

<sup>166</sup>JPost Staff. “65 Percent of Israelis Say no Danger of New Holocaust”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 04/03/2013. Web

either 1) the public's attitudes towards the prospect of an Israeli "unilateral strike" on Iranian nuclear facilities, responses presented a high level of opposition.

Case in point are the JCPA and Dahaf polls aforementioned and their variation from findings established by the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah in the same month. The latter sources found that "an absolute majority of Israelis (69%) support cooperation between Israel and the US in bombing Iran's nuclear facilities", whereas "only a minority (42%) support such a course of action if Israel has to bomb the Iranian nuclear facilities on its own". The Truman Center et al.'s finding is furthered by the discrepancy in the findings provided by JCPA and Dahaf Institute polls, conducted in March 2012. The later set of polls reveal that "Sixty-two percent of the respondents" believed that "...if the US should launch military action in order to stop Iran, the price that Israel would pay would be lower than if Israel should act on its own"<sup>167</sup>. These polls further demonstrated a twenty percent discrepancy in terms of the source of where a military attack should come from, in that "80% of Israelis agree that the US army has the ability to cause significant harm to the Iranian nuclear program" where as a mere "66% of respondents said that they believed in the IDF's ability to cause significant harm to Iran". These findings reveal that among the Israeli's polled, the majority place the alliance between the United States at the center of their understanding of what can be done to thwart a nuclear Iran. This popular opinion is more in line with the stance adopted by President Shimon Peres and his innumerable statements calling for increased US-Israeli unity, through statements such as those issues in early August: "It is clear to us that we cannot do it [attack] on our own...We

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<sup>167</sup>"Israeli Public Opinion Polls : Attitudes Towards Iran". Jewish Virtual Library, accessed on 01/11/13 from [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society\\_&\\_Culture/ispoiran.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society_&_Culture/ispoiran.html). Web.

can delay it but it is clear that we need to proceed together with America. There are questions of cooperation and of timetables, but as severe as the danger is, at least this time we're not alone." In this sense the varied results in public opinion demonstrate two important facts, firstly that when the question of an Iranian existential threat is cast within the frame of the US-Israeli relationship, the answers of the mass public change substantially to not supporting Netanyahu's calls for a unilateral strike. Instead, what is most apparent are a set of perceptions which place international support, and more specifically American support, at the center of any coherent response, military or non-military, to Iran's possession of nuclear capability. Fortifying this finding is the empirical linearity of generic perceptions about whether Israel is alone in thwarting a nuclear Iran, beginning in November 2011 with a finding by the Peace Index, which highlights that the majority of Israelis polled only "moderately agree" that "it will be impossible to prevent Iran from going nuclear in the long term, and that "therefore...Israel should come to terms with this reality and devise a security strategy based on the assumption that Israel is not the only nuclear state in the region"(Appendix 1)<sup>168</sup>.

#### FINDING 5: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIGH VOLUME OF DISSENTION & SHIFTS IN THE ISRAELI PUBLIC'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SUCCESS OF AN ATTACK

In observing the complex interplay of media, government, the security establishment and civil society on the Iranian issue in Israel there have surfaced numerous challenges to the idea that Israel **must** attack Iran to prevent its emergence as a rival bent on its destruction. This study conceptualizes such challenges within the frame of a counter-discourse, which has responded to the Netanyahu administration's construction of a mainstream or dominant discourse around the issue of Iranian nuclear capability. This counter-discourse is extremely difficult to track through public opinion because of the difficulty in centralizing its varying

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<sup>168</sup> See *Appendix 1: The Peace Index*. Herrman, Tamar. "The Peace Index : November 2011". *The Peace Index*. Web.

claims into categories and subcategories, however, this paper proposes such a framework by the identification of four main streams of counter-discourse or *dissention*. Primarily mainstream dissention can be seen as falling under: 1) Dissention towards the “qualification of Iran as an existential Threat”, 2) the demand for “more sanctions & alternatives to military confrontation”, 3) the demand for “extended decision-making, public debate & political due process” in discussing the threat conceptualized by the dominant camp as “existential”, and finally, 4) American Objection and International Objection. Within the months of focus for this study, public opinion concerning the Israeli public’s attitudes towards the success of an attack changed drastically, and shifted towards opposing such. Prime examples include the months of November 2011, where two public opinion polls taken by mainstream Israeli newspaper Haaretz in cooperation with Dialog, which questioned whether Israel should attack Iran’s nuclear facilities?” found 41% in favor, 39% opposed, and 20% undecided<sup>169</sup>.

This result presents a stark departure from polls conducted less than three months down the line in February 2012, a poll conducted within a wider population sample by Peace Index polling found that a mere 21 % of Israelis, both Jewish and Arab, would support a Unilateral military attack on Iranian nuclear facilities in comparison to a large 63% of the population which claimed to be opposed to such. If we examine these findings in the context of polling information taken by Israel Hayom in October 2013, than the finding of dissention and contestation within several key junctures during the debate, such as the example identified in November 2011, becomes clearer. Israel Hayom’s poll found that over 65% of Israelis to “be in favor” of Netanyahu’s position that Israel should face Iran alone if necessary, with “21.8%” opposing it and 12.5% having no opinion<sup>170</sup>(See Appendix 2). The massive variations in support for dealing with issue in unilateral terms,

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<sup>169</sup>Haaretz Staff. “Haaretz poll: Israelis evenly split over attacking”. Haaretz. 11/03/11.Web.

<sup>170</sup>Israel Hayom Staff. “Poll: Two-thirds of Israeli Jews back unilateral Iran strike. Israel Hayom. 04/10/2013. Web.

not only demonstrates the ability of Netanyahu to construct a base of political support behind his Iranian threat narrative, but more importantly demonstrates the effect which mainstream counter-discourse is able to have on a popular level. In November 2011, there were statements by members within Netanyahu's political administration as well as those who were formerly involved in the military or security echelon of decision making, such as Former National Security Council director Giora Eiland, former Mossad Director Ephraim Halevy, Intelligence Affairs Minister Dan Meridor, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and the former head of the anti-missile Arrow program Uzi Rubin all mounted some form of opposition which demanded for Israel's elite political leadership to reconsider the salience of any decision to unilaterally bomb Iran<sup>171</sup>. What this demonstrates are the unintended effects of Netanyahu's campaign of persuasion in generating a political community, which has actively contested and challenged the dominant understandings cast forth by Netanyahu's inner-security community (see section on Security Community). Central within this community has been the need to extend public debate around the decision to bomb Iran and to further allow for a more expansive forum in which political considerations are weighed alongside the military-style thinking.

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<sup>171</sup>Katz, Yaakov. "Iran outdoes N. Korea's long-range missile development". The Jerusalem Post. 15/07/2011. Web.

## Section 6: Conclusion And Prescriptions for change

This Section marks the most important conclusions arrived at through this critical discourse analysis and further voices how applying the lens of Desecuritization to the given case study results in an optimistic set of prescriptions for the future of the Iranian nuclear debate. This study emphasizes the need for an extended focus on the presence of political debate within Israel concerning civil society leading up to public policy decisions concerning matters of national security and the range of existential threats it faces today. It proposes to meet such a need by invoking a rarely adopted emphasis on the presence of contestation and resistance to dominant narratives or discourses stressing the concepts of enmity, exclusion and emergency. The Iranian nuclear debate provides for a prime example of how to delve into questioning why such dynamics have catalyzed Israel's foreign policy decisions, but further, why these concepts need not be seen as an endemic feature of Israel's body politic. The ability of discourse to shift the decision-making processes once dominated by the political elite and military echelon in Israel, towards a more open societal debate on the merits of why existential threats are qualified as such demonstrates a unique and important example within its history, which requires further analysis.

The analysis of the emergence and evolution of the dominant and contending discourses on the Iranian nuclear threat reveals several important conclusions. Primarily it emphasizes the role which discursive manipulation and framing are able to play in establishing both a dominant understanding and ideological foothold for the need for exceptional measures and the creation of public perceptions imbued with enmity and exclusion towards Iran. The ability of one dominant camp to establish a frame of existential threat through projections of images and words paired with varying moves or acts, instructively qualify the need for a more extensive and comprehensive inclusion of the power of ideas and language in studies of public policy decisions revolving around security in the state of Israel. The pairing of varying securitizing moves with language and the construction of political imaginaries

around the need to confront the Iranian existential threat, demonstrates the importance of language as a tool for manipulation in the sphere of Moreover the ability of different political identities and communities to form behind competing discourses further demonstrates the theoretical significance of studying moments of acceptance and resistance within civil societies, such as Israel's.

This case study contributes to the theoretical development of the concepts of securitization and desecuritization in putting forth both an example as well as a direct challenge to their classic definition within Critical Security Studies. The evolution of public debate, the prevalence of multiple audiences and participants, the difficulty in locating any definitive acceptance of the Iranian nuclear threat as existential, as well as, the strong presence of counter-discourse, all contribute towards this case's uniqueness. What remains is an extended focus on these dynamics and how they can both lead towards an issues conceptualization as one of imminence and urgency, while not necessitating complete acceptance by widespread public approval.

Analyzing the emergence and evolution of the dominant and contending discourses on the Iranian nuclear threat shows some important results. Primarily it demonstrates that the use of discursive manipulation by Netanyahu and the Dominant camp of actors more broadly, lead to the widespread acceptance of the Iranian nuclear threat by the Israeli population. Furthermore, the discourse espoused by Netanyahu and Barak, more specifically demonstrates the use of ideological framing and the reconceptualization of the Iranian threat to encompass dimensions and characteristics, which are not bound by territory or geography. Secondly, this study has demonstrated that the Dominant camp's pairing of 'speech' or basic utterance on Israel's security relative to the emergence of the Iranian nuclear program, with 'acts', such as the acquisition or testing of weapons and military technology, reveals an instance of an attempted securitization. These pairings

amount to what can be conceptualized as “securitizing moves”<sup>172</sup>, and thereby constitute the demonstration to qualify the Iranian nuclear program in the terms of exception, enmity and emergency.

Thirdly this analysis has shed light on the use of security expertise by both Dominant and Dissenting groups of actors to legitimate their individual discourses and attempts to both qualify as well as resist the frame of existential threat and exception. Fourthly this study infers through the analysis of public opinion data from January 2011- November 2012 that the attitudes of the Israeli public towards the existential character of the Iranian threat have not varied a great deal over time. However, it further reveals, more importantly, that the attitudes of the Israeli population towards Israel’s execution of a unilateral strike have changed drastically over time, revealing the ability of both Dominant, as well as, Dissenting groups of actors to influence public attention towards the Iranian nuclear issue throughout the time period examined. Lastly, this study concludes that there is indeed a strong relationship between the high volume of dissention and substantial shifts in the Israeli public’s attitudes towards the success of an attack, by examining trends on public opinion throughout the period of analysis.

This case study on the Iranian nuclear threat contributes to the theoretical development of the Critical Security Studies’ concepts of “political spectacle” and “desecuritization”. The inability of one group of actors to establish a single discourse within a single frame, and have such accepted by the majority of the Israeli population, further exemplifies why the concept of a “political spectacle”<sup>173</sup> holds a great deal of explanatory power in identifying the characteristics of contestation and deliberation within Israeli civil society. The fluidity of this process and its defying the classic theoretical

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<sup>172</sup> McDonald, M. “Constructivisms” in Williams, Paul D., ed. *Security Studies: an introduction*. (London : Routledge, 2012) : 73

<sup>173</sup> Huysmans, Jef. *The politics of insecurity: Fear, migration and asylum in the EU*. Routledge, 2006. 60-63

parameters attributed to the “instantaneous”<sup>174</sup> acceptance of an issue as securitized, as imagined by more traditional approaches and definitions of “Securitization Theory”, provides a step forward in imagining the varying shapes which the basic concept of securitization is able to take. In this way, what the Iranian nuclear debate provides is an example of an attempted securitization by one group of Dominant actors, and its resistance by a Dissenting community of actors. The

The empirics analyzed and provided lend themselves to a more flexible understanding of this process and thereby mirror what is closer to CSS’s articulation of desecuritization and the “shifting of an issue” out of the realm of exception, unease and emergency<sup>175</sup>. This analysis therefore emphasizes the need for a more extensive and comprehensive inclusion of the power of ideas and language in examining instances of public debate and junctures of widespread contestation by civil society actors found within the community of Dissenters aforementioned.

### **Future Questions & Applications to Consider : The CSS approach to the Israeli Context**

The permanence of war inevitably leads to the creation of a decision-making system in Israel that is prone to operate according to the politics of emergency. This crucial contextual feature allows for a system to emerge in which increased legitimacy and trust is granted to those seen as representing such politics and in which further there is a definitive need to instill political fear in its populace.<sup>176</sup> The prevalence of such a securitized discourse on Iran, within one political grouping, however, has **not** lead to its definitive acceptance by former members of Israel’s intelligence community, military advisors, politicians,

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<sup>174</sup>Salter, Mark B. “Securitization and Desecuritization : a Dramaturgical Analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Authority”. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 11 (2008) :323

<sup>175</sup>Hansen, Lene. “Reconstructing Desecuritization : the Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply it”. *Review of International Studies*. 38 (2012): 525

<sup>176</sup> Ben Meir, Yehuda. “The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran”. *INSS* (2013): 230

academics, and the Israeli public<sup>177</sup>. The lens of discourse analysis of the Iranian threat in Israel indicates that new political communities have emerged to participate in a public debate on the country's security<sup>178</sup>.

**The Dominant political community of dissenters has attempted to securitize the Iranian nuclear issue using various *securitizing moves***

Netanyahu and his supporting community of security experts, politicians and public figures constructed a discourse ripe with statements warning the world of an “impending nuclear holocaust” being pursued by a “dark regime”, and more specifically warning the Israeli public that the Iranian nuclear project “poses an existential threat to Israel and the World”<sup>179</sup>. This type of rhetoric has received support within the Israeli populace as leading Israeli media public Yisrael Hayom published that 55.3% of the general public answered “yes” that they were “happy with the prime minister’s handling of the issue”<sup>180</sup>. This poll has been complemented by numerous public opinion measures by the Dahaf Agency which “stated that 81 percent of Israelis oppose a solo attack on Iran” while “two-thirds of Israelis would support military action if coordinated with Washington”<sup>181</sup>. What this demonstrates is the ability of a discourse immersed in myth, enmity and exceptionalism, to capture a substantial amount of support within multiple audiences containing security professionals and voters. Netanyahu’s statements have often been followed by material displays of power in the form of the testing of Israel’s “Arrow-3” missile and “Magic Wand” defense systems, deploying of naval ships in anticipation of an Iranian attack<sup>182</sup> as well as, the initiation of covert

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<sup>177</sup> Ben Meir, Yehuda. “The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran”: 230

<sup>178</sup> Ben Meir, Yehuda. “The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran”: 232

<sup>179</sup> Mualem, Mazal. “Netanyahu Plays the Iran Card in Israeli Politics”. *Al-Monitor*. 26/11/2013. Web.

<sup>180</sup> Mualem, Mazal. “Netanyahu Plays the Iran Card in Israeli Politics”. *Al-Monitor*. 26/11/2013. Web..

<sup>181</sup> Cesana, Shlomo, Tuchfeld, Matti & Yakov, Nitzni. “Diskin’s remarks irresponsible, stem from personal frustration”. 29/04/2012. Web.

<sup>182</sup> Yehoshua, Yossi. “Iron Dome will provide protection—but not for civilians”. *Yedioth Achronoth*. 08/13/12. Web.

operations in the form of assassinations and the implanting of viruses<sup>183</sup>.

**Certain Images from Netanyahu's Dominant discourse on Iran have been called into question throughout the period of analysis**

Netanyahu's use of the keywords marked above in terms of strategies and his initiation of the specific terms of "existential threat", "shadow of annihilation", "strike", "running out of time" and "holocaust", throughout the period in which these polls were conducted, signify a clear attempt to frame Iran as indefinitely the "greatest existential threat facing Israel today. Netanyahu and his community of security experts have indefinitely been able to persuade majorities of the Israeli population of these characteristics and therefore establish the existential danger posed by Iran, however, looking more closely at these polls, renders quite a different picture in terms of the implications of these opinions. Over and above the multiple images incorporated into Netanyahu's attempted framing of a nuclear Iran, as the first signification of an impending regional war in the Middle East, is that of the holocaust. Netanyahu has focused his speeches and public statements on stretching this historical event to fit the realities expressed by Iranian nuclear belligerence and calls to "annihilate" Israel. However, as responses from the political opposition have demonstrated, in the form of mass objections, such as those exhibited by Israeli opposition leader Tzipi Livni calling it "inappropriate for the government to use such rhetoric", former military chief Dan Halutz who stated that "Holocaust-like" invocations scare the entire nation, as well as, mass media commentator Gideon Levy, who wrote in the liberal daily Haaretz that Netanyahu had "belittled and cheapened" memories of the Holocaust<sup>184</sup>. These responses can be seen throughout 2011-13, as demonstrating a larger trend within Israel's civil society towards questioning the saliency of the symbols used to conceptualize the existential threat, which Iran poses to Israel. A classic example of this type dissention that is central to the analysis

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<sup>183</sup>Goldberg, Jeffrey. "Analysts believe Israel is moving closer to Iran strike". *The Atlantic*. 01/11/2011. Web.

<sup>184</sup>Reuters Staff. "Netanyahu defends comparison of Iran, Nazi Holocaust". *Reuters*.04/18/12. Web.

offered throughout this MRP, are the words of ex-heads of the Mossad and Shin Bet Security Institutions, Meir Dagan and Yuval Diskin. These two men have consistently questioned Netanyahu's messianic vision of the Iranian nuclear threat as "rendering a false picture on the Iran question" to the "Israeli public" and further demonstrating the need for a change in leadership towards more "responsible leaders"<sup>185</sup>. While it is difficult to infer the ability of this counter-discourse to have a definitive affect on mass opinion about Netanyahu's leadership, it is possible to infer that counter-discourse around the Iranian nuclear issue in Israel has certainly lead to some long-term change in the number of Israelis that believe Iran's possession of a nuclear bomb to ensure the threat of a 'second holocaust. Dahaf polls taken in early in April 2013 demonstrate that "nearly two-thirds – 65 percent – of Israelis do not believe in the danger of another Holocaust occurring" as a result of a nuclear Iran"<sup>186</sup>. This finding in public opinion is emblematic of the fading level of public attention to the key features and building blocks of Netanyahu's dominant narrative, in terms of his mass appeal to the Jewish people's collective memory of the horrors of the holocaust, and his attempt to condition the legacy of the holocaust towards Israel's "obligation to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapon, and "the world's obligation, but above all it is our obligation". What this finding makes clear is that while Netanyahu's pointed rhetoric is able to impact the opinions of the Israeli public temporarily, achieving a high level of public attention towards the issue of Iran is not a definitive outcome of his practice of such rhetoric.

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<sup>185</sup>Lappin, Yaakov & Katz, Yaakov. "Dagan supports Diskin's Iran comments". *The Jerusalem Post*. 04/29/2012.Web.

<sup>186</sup>JPost Staff."65% of Israelis say no danger of new Holocaust". *The Jerusalem Post*. 04/03/13. Web.

**This case study strengthens the empirical foundation of the “understudied process of “Desecuritization” in Critical Security Studies, by providing a practical example of the “shifting [of] an issue out of the realm of securitization and emergency politics and into the realm of normal political or technical debate”<sup>187</sup>.**

Due to the continuous presence of existential threats, the country of Israel is a special case, in that the politics of exception, attributed in CSS towards processes of an issue’s successful securitization, are the norm<sup>188</sup>. The case of Israel, and the attempted securitization of the issue of Iranian nuclear capability by the Netanyahu administration, demonstrates a unique moment in the Israeli political context, where the dynamics of a successful securitization have been resisted, challenged and blocked. This challenge has emanated from a political community composed of past security experts and former heads of intelligence in Israel, who have created a counter-discourse that mirrors many of the dynamics of the “understudied” process of desecuritization, as articulated and defined by Aradau & Hansen<sup>189</sup>.

Lene Hansen argues that public discourses are crucial elements for understanding the securitization of an issue because of their role as “substantial articulations of identity and policy”<sup>190</sup>. In the case of the Iranian nuclear debate, one dominant *Iranian threat* discourse, issued by the Netanyahu government and its camp of security experts, has failed to project a “concrete policy”, instead “structur[ing] the policy space within which concrete policy decisions can be made”<sup>191</sup>. Within this policy space powerful speech acts followed by

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<sup>187</sup>Aradau, Claudia. “Security and the Democratic Scene: Desecuritization and Emancipation”. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 7 (2004):388–413

<sup>188</sup>Kimmerling, Baruch. *Clash of Identities: Explorations in Israeli and Palestinian Societies*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 157

<sup>189</sup>Aradau, Claudia. “Security and the Democratic Scene: Desecuritization and Emancipation,” : 388 & Hansen, Lene. “Reconstructing Desecuritization : the Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply it”. *Review of International Studies*. 38 (2012): 525

<sup>190</sup>Hansen, Lene. *Security As Practice ; Discourse Analysis & The Bosnian War*. (London : Routledge, 2006): 215

<sup>191</sup>Hansen, Lene. *Security As Practice ; Discourse Analysis & The Bosnian War*, 213

innumerable “securitizing moves”<sup>192</sup> have enabled the emergence of an ‘Iranian threat’ discourse.

This pattern has commonly taken the shape of a powerful speech or statement by the Netanyahu government or its security experts, followed by: military exercises, displays of military power, the release of emergency threat assessments and statements, and the selective release of information from secret cabinet meetings or nuclear summits. The “Iranian threat” camp is composed of the Netanyahu administration, supported by various “security experts” of those within an “inner circle” of IDF Generals, Heads of Intelligence agencies (Mossad & ShinBet) and military advisors. This group has indefinitely accepted the need to qualify Iran in existentially threatening terms<sup>193</sup>. The second political group consists of ex-security experts and heads of intelligence, academics, politicians and NGOs. They have issued what can best be understood as a “counter-discourse” to the political language espoused from the Netanyahu camp, rejecting the view of Iran as existentially threatening to Israel.

This counter-discourse represents a commencement of a long process of desecuritization, which can be simply understood as the “shifting [of] an issue out of the realm of securitization and emergency politics and into the realm of normal political or technical debate”. The rise of a political community to dispute the dominant terms of the discourse being espoused by the Israeli government today, in terms of its insistence on the “threat posed to the entire world” by Iranian nuclearization, in many ways resembles Claudia Aradau’s definition of the concept. Claudia Aradau argues for the need to position Ken Booth’s concept of emancipation as the normative goal behind desecuritization, and further maintains that desecuritization commonly contains a fight against the “extraordinary”, as well

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<sup>192</sup>McDonald, M. “Constructivisms” in Williams, Paul D., ed. *Security Studies: an introduction*. (London : Routledge, 2012) : 73

<sup>193</sup>Feldman et al. “What to Do about Nuclearizing Iran?”. *The Israeli Debate Crown Center for Middle East Studies*, 29 (2012): 1

as, “exclusionary measures” which the logic of security dictates.<sup>194</sup> Central to Aradau’s analysis, and central within the process of desecuritization, is the “un-making” of the set of politics that underlie the logic of security.

In this sense, Aradau is suggesting that desecuritization is a return to democratic politics, which lie in direct opposition to the “speed, exceptionalism, and extraordinary measures” inherent within securitization’s emergency politics<sup>195</sup>. The Iranian threat in Israel case presents a strong presence of such a “fight” for the return to democratic politics “where emancipation is possible”. The main actors within the camp of dissenters to Netanyahu’s Iranian threat discourse have voiced the need for a political transition away from “leaders that cannot be trusted”, who are “undemocratic” and who willingly defy the opinions of their public, and reject the possibility of a more inclusive level of political discussion<sup>196</sup>.

This political community of “dissenters” challenges the dominant discourse, calling for a retreat from exception and emergency. Within the dominant discourse, are those whom are more or less receptive to the threat’s background “history, memory and discursive tropes”, and as a result, will either become agents that accept a securitization or reject it<sup>197</sup>. The dominant camp of agents whom have accepted the social and historical legitimacy of Netanyahu’s projection of the Iranian threat, are composed of heads of IDF Intelligence Aviv Kochavi, Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, former Defense Minister Ehud Barak, former Shin Bet director Avi Dichter, and former IAF General Amos Yadlin, to name a few. These agents have supported Netanyahu’s demand to initiate a discourse of emergency and exceptionalism surrounding the presence of an Iranian nuclear threat, by making public statements imbued with “ticking time bomb scenarios”, and assessments of the saliency of

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<sup>194</sup>Aradau, Claudia. *Security and the Democratic Scene: Desecuritization and Emancipation*. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 7(2004) : 407

<sup>195</sup>Aradau, Claudia. *Security and the Democratic Scene: Desecuritization and Emancipation*: 406

<sup>196</sup>JPost Staff. “Diskin: Netanyahu unreliable, 'possessed' by Iran”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 01/04/2013.Web

<sup>197</sup>Taureck,Rita. “Securitization theory – The Story so far: Theoretical inheritance and What it Means to be a Post-Structural Realist”. *University of Tartu: CEEISA Convention* (2006) :12

emergency planning in the event of a regional war lead by an Iranian nuclear attack<sup>198</sup>. As Michael Williams has argued, what is behind any leader or political group looking to securitize an issue and construct it in the terms of ‘existential threat’ is the desire to cast a threat within the “politics of enmity and emergency”<sup>199</sup>. .

The execution of carefully worded speech acts and securitizing moves are what CSS scholar Williams would call a direct “attempt by the sovereign to decide the exception”<sup>200</sup>. The events of April 19th constitute one of dozens of such moments, in which unique and powerful political imaginaries were stressed, such as the “window of opportunity”, “zone of immunity”, the infamous ACME bomb chart drawn at the UN General Assembly in September 2012, the success of the Stuxnet virus, and the recent Israeli indictment, at the UN GA in September 2013, that the new Iranian President Rouhani as a “wolf dressed in sheep’s clothing”<sup>201</sup>. Such images provoke the creation of an antagonistic vision of a threatening “other”, and the primacy of security logics or tools in dealing with this “other”<sup>202</sup>. The presence of such an imaginary is immediately clear in Israel, through observing Netanyahu’s construction of the Iranian other as an enemy not only threatening the territorial existence of the Israeli state, but more so the survival of a Jewish nation.

Case in point are his references to Iran in April 2012 as “Nazi Germany” under the leadership of a “modern day Hitler”, Ayatollah Khamenei, as well as, his naming Iran one of the “dark regimes of the past” which have “tried to wipe out the Jews and then conquer the

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<sup>198</sup>See Ronen, Gil. “**IAF generals 'loudly' demanding strike on Iran**”. *Arutz Sheva*. 3/09/2011. Web. , Ya’ar, Chana. “Home Front Command to Test SMS Warning System”. *Arutz Sheva*. 12/08/11. Web. Keinon, Herb. “**PM rebuffs reports that home front not prepared**”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 12/08/2012. Web., & . Gur, Chaviv R. “Former IDF intel chief: US coming around to an Israeli strike on Iran”. *The Times of Israel*. 012/08/2013. Web. & JPost Staff. “Dichter : Iran Poses a Threat To Israel’s Existence”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 08/19/2012. Web.

<sup>199</sup>Taureck, Rita. “Securitization theory – The Story so far: Theoretical inheritance and What it Means to be a Post-Structural Realist”. *University of Tartu: CEEISA Convention (2006)* :15

<sup>200</sup>Salter, Mark B. “Securitization and Desecuritization : a Dramaturgical Analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Authority”. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 11 (2008) :323

<sup>201</sup>Feldman et al. “What to Do about Nuclearizing Iran? The Israeli Debate”. *Crown Center for Middle East Studies*, 9 (2012):1,2

<sup>202</sup>Hansen, Lene. (2006) *Security As Practice ; Discourse Analysis & The Bosnian War* . (London : Routledge, 2006):213

world” in November 2013<sup>203</sup>. Netanyahu’s attachment of these labels to the Iranian other, over the span of almost four years, has created a prism for the Israeli public, through which to understand Iran’s nuclearization, as immediately threatening the survival of the Jewish people. More importantly than this, what his discourse has been able to accomplish is the construction of an Israeli “self”, which cannot tolerate the presence of an Iranian nuclear power in a region in which it has fought endless wars for its own survival. As Hansen has stated, the creation of a dominant discourse, creates a “pronounced identity, or a “Self” and further structures a “policy space”, in which certain images, words and symbols count more than others in “constructing an identity”<sup>204</sup>.

Mitzen has argued that states not only seek physical security, but further require “ontological security” or security in terms of their identities<sup>205</sup>. Netanyahu’s discourse attaches a level of political fear to the very idea of Iranian nuclear capability, and thus limits both the ability to discuss it in non-security or normal political terms. Naming a threat in these terms reflects the fact that a series of *political* decisions are made in terms of how to “handle [the threat] in the specific security mode of emergency, urgency and drama”<sup>206</sup>. The varying examples of securitizing moves by the dominant Iranian threat camp represent calculated attempts to demonstrate the security of a “Self” which is “not prepared to allow Iran” or any other regional power, the development of a nuclear weapon, and for which “the option” of unilateral nuclear attack on its enemies is “always on the table”<sup>207</sup>.

In establishing this “Self”, Netanyahu has left behind many of the processes of politics of contestation and normal decision making, such as negotiations, diplomatic measures, or the use of international institutions, such as the United Nations. Prime example

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<sup>203</sup> Fiske, Govriel & Winer, Stuart. “Netanyahu vows: No nukes for Iran’s ‘dark regime’”. 11/10/2013.Web.

<sup>204</sup> Hansen, Lene. (2006) *Security As Practice ; Discourse Analysis & The Bosnian War*: 213

<sup>205</sup> Mitzen, Jennifer “Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 12. 3 (2006): 341

<sup>206</sup> Barak, Oren & Sheffer, Gabriel (2009) *Existential Threats and Civil Security Relations* (Plymouth : Rowman & Littlefield, 2006) :19

<sup>207</sup> Feldman et al. “What to Do about Nuclearizing Iran?”*The Israeli Debate Crown Center for Middle East Studies* 59 (2012) : 1

of such rest in Netanyahu's calling rounds of economic sanctions leveled against Iran as "too slow" and granting Iran "a gift" in the form of more time to develop its ability to build a bomb. Netanyahu has attacked President Rouhani's rapprochement with the United States and the signing of the Geneva interim agreement nearly one month ago, as "soothing rhetoric" coming from a "wolf dressed in sheep's clothing"<sup>208</sup>. These statements affirm an Israeli "Self" operating in a paradigm of distrust and self-help when it comes to matters of its own security. This political identity embodies a set of logics about survival that are unwilling to allow determinations of long-term political planning to prevail over the military and emergency style decision making that have ensured Israel's victory in over four regional wars<sup>209</sup>.

Michael argues that, due to the blurred line between military and political echelons of decision-making in Israel, most existential threats to Israel are framed and derived from mainly military-style thought<sup>210</sup>. Michaels points to the path-dependent past of the IDF as an institution "overshadowing the political echelon" in a way that "forced the latter to comply with the recommendations" of the military echelon. It is as a result of this asymmetric relationship that any decisions concerning the "naming of existential threats" to the Jewish people are tasked to those inhabiting an "inner circle" of security experts<sup>211</sup>. The "Self" projected by Netanyahu's Iranian threat discourse feeds into an identity premised on insecurity and a need to transform the "normal politics" of Israel into the constant projection of threats to its existence. This routinized feature of Israeli politics renders a state ripe with the condition of 'insecurity', and therefore the replacement of political contestation and debate with enclosed militarized decision-making.

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<sup>208</sup>Belz, Emily. "Netanyahu: Soothing rhetoric doesn't erase Iran's 'savage record'". *WorldMag*, 30/10/2013. Web

<sup>209</sup>Kimmerling, Baruch. *Clash of Identities: Explorations in Israeli and Palestinian Societies*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 175

<sup>210</sup>Michael, Kobi. "Who Really Dictates What an Existential Threat Is? The Israeli Experience". *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32.5(2009):670

<sup>211</sup>Michael, Kobi. "Who Really Dictates What an Existential Threat Is? The Israeli Experience," 690

A new political community and political identity have emerged in Israel, in defiance of the ‘Self’ championed by Netanyahu’s Iranian threat narrative. Hansen’s discursive lens provides a way to understand this political community’s defiance as direct challenge to the projection of a narrative of immanency of an Iranian attack on Israel. Analysis and understanding of the unique counter-discourse created by this political community is central to demonstrating that Netanyahu’s attempted securitization of the Iranian nuclear has been blocked. If we backtrack to Salter and Balzacq’s understanding of securitization as an “iterative political process”, it is exactly such a dynamic that can be observed between the dominant Iranian threat discourse and the growing counter-discourse opposing Netanyahu’s narrative as lacking consideration of “Israel’s national security interests”, “reckless”, and ripe with the presence of false claims that “are misleading the public”<sup>212</sup>.

Central to the counter-discourse camp are ex-heads of security intelligence agencies, the Mossad and Shin Bet, Meir Dagan, Ephraim Halevy, Yuval Diskin, and former Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, to name a few. These men have repeatedly challenged Netanyahu’s threat assessments by pointing towards its impractical, mythical, and politically motivated features of such assessments, throughout the duration of 2010-13. These actors argue that Iran will not be in possession of a nuclear weapon able to destroy Israel until at least 2015, adding that the process of delivering such a weapon could take even more time. To support such statements, Dagan, for example, has claimed that since Iran does not have the capabilities to produce a nuclear weapon in the near future, Israel needs to focus its efforts on adopting a position of solidarity with the United States and insist on the exhaustion of diplomatic channels<sup>213</sup>. Dagan has echoed such statements with clarifying the possibility that Israel’s unilateral attack on Iran “would bring missiles pouring down on this country” and

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<sup>212</sup>Lappin, Yaakov & Katz, Yaakov. “Dagan supports Diskin’s Iran comments”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 04/29/2012.Web & JPost Staff. “Diskin: Netanyahu unreliable, 'possessed' by Iran”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 01/04/2013.Web

<sup>213</sup> Even, Dan. “Former Mossad chief: Iran far from achieving nuclear bomb”. *Haaretz*. 04/10/2011.. Web.

holds with it the more serious threat of ostracizing Israel from the United States, a crucial military alliance which an equally powerful role in ensuring its survival to date. Meir Dagan, and others, have been labeled as disloyal or out of touch with Israel's true identity, as the only Jewish nation state in a region with innumerable enemies bent on "wiping [Israel] off the map"<sup>214</sup>.

Dagan's criticisms have been echoed by former head of the Shin Bet Yuval Diskin, who stated poignantly that Netanyahu is a leader both "possessed by Iran," as well as, by his own reckless perceptions of what the possibility of an Iranian threat means for Israel's security in the region. Diskin has elaborated on these criticisms, stating more clearly that he does not trust a leadership, which enacts closed networks and "secret meetings" where decisions of national importance are discussed informally, without the possibility of extended debate. Diskin on several occasions even compared Netanyahu to Labour PM Menachem Begin, stating that "when it comes to Iran, Netanyahu is possessed by the image of Menachem Begin, who ordered the attack on Iraq's Osirak reactor" in 1982, and put his legacy as the leader who "prevented another holocaust" ahead of Israel's "national interests"<sup>215</sup>. What these comments allude that Netanyahu, much like Begin, has allowed for calculations of his legacy to overtake considerations of Israel's national interest.

For Diskin, and many others within the political echelon, such as former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Netanyahu's narrative concerning Iran has reflected the presence of a "crisis of leadership, values and total contempt for the public". Olmert has elaborated on this opposition, pointing to the massive amount of intellectual and material resources, which have been dedicated to Netanyahu's "Iran policy" have placed" an undue financial strain on Israel, criticizing the 10 Billion US Dollars spent on preparations for a possible attack on

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<sup>214</sup> Caspit, Ben. "Left nothing to the imagination". *Ma'ariv Newspaper*. 04/19/2012. Web.

<sup>215</sup> Lappin, Yaakov & Katz, Yaakov. "Dagan supports Diskin's Iran comments". *The Jerusalem Post*. 04/29/2012. Web. & JPost Staff. "Diskin: Netanyahu unreliable leader, 'possessed' by Iran". *The Jerusalem Post*. 01/04/2013. Web

Iran<sup>216</sup>. Olmert has received support in his words from ex-Chief of Staff Gab Ashkenazi who advocated as well, that since a military strike on Iran will “not needed tomorrow morning,” a strategy regarding Iran’s possession of nuclear weapons must emphasize the role of sanctions as opposed to the spending of Israel’s national security budget<sup>217</sup>. These sentiments emerging from political and security networks have further materialized into more active and pointed resistance towards Netanyahu’s narrative, in the form of Israeli Defense Force petitions against pursuing a unilateral attack<sup>218</sup>, scientific reports on Iran’s actual nuclear capabilities, mass protests, public opinion polls, and most recently a call by Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to give extended negotiations and diplomacy a chance in curbing Iran’s nuclear ambitions<sup>219</sup>.

These challenges add up to a discourse that runs counter to the Netanyahu government’s attempt at constructing an imminent Iranian nuclear threat, thereby disallowing for the lifting of the issue above the environment of normal political debate and contestation, into the realm of emergency-level politics. This counter discourse has voiced an overall opposition to war with a nuclear rival as the only option “on the table” and has countered Netanyahu’s tying the legacy of the six million casualties suffered during the Holocaust to the prevention of a nuclear Iran. These challenges, in terms of the presence of a demand to revert to the politics of normal and deliberative decision making, which characterize a democracy, can, and should, be seen as a *deseccuritizing move*<sup>220</sup>.

Desecuritization can be defined very simply as “the moving of an issue out of

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<sup>216</sup> Harel, Amos. *Ehud Olmert: Netanyahu tried to interfere in U.S. elections*. Web.

<sup>217</sup> Harel, Amos. *Ehud Olmert: Netanyahu tried to interfere in U.S. elections*. Web.

<sup>218</sup> See: Even, Dan. “Hundreds of Israelis petition IDF pilots: Refuse orders to bomb Iran”. Haaretz, 08/16/2012. Web. Ginsburg, Mitch “Israeli expert: Iran already a nuclear power, but can’t deliver a bomb”. *The Times of Israel*. 09/10/2012. Web. Al-Monitor & Ma`ariv Staff. “Facebook Effect: Iranian Students 'Love' Israel”. *Al-Monitor & Ma`ariv*. 05/28/2012. Web.

<sup>219</sup> All-Rome, Barbara O. “Israelis Back Netanyahu’s Belligerence Over Iran”. *Defense News*. 03/12/2013. Web.

<sup>220</sup> Hansen, Lene. “Reconstructing Desecuritization : the Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply it”. *Review of International Studies*. 38 (2012): 525

the sphere of security”<sup>221</sup>. Hansen notes that we can better understand this process by exploring two components of security politics: the *public sphere* and the *friend-enemy distinction*<sup>222</sup>. Within CSS there has been a great deal of debate dedicated to what this process actually looks like. For the purpose of this analysis, Hansen’s definition is most relevant because of her engagement with these two concepts is crucial to understanding the process of an attempted securitization surrounding Iranian nuclear capability in Israel. The *public sphere* alludes to the idea that desecuritization involves the creation or reactivation of the public sphere as a space in which the securitization of an issue can be debated and, as the Israeli case demonstrates, rejected. Hansen reasons that part of securitization is the “implied right to prevent information from reaching the public sphere” and thereby the restricted ability of any sizeable group to mobilize in opposition to the initiation of ‘security speak’.

Desecuritization frames the political sphere as a “dynamic space” in which a “wider set of actors” are engaged, than if the issue were “constituted as one of securitization”<sup>223</sup>. The statements made by the former heads of intelligence and security institutions challenging the need for increased transparency with the public about the true danger posed by a nuclear Iran, encompass a very similar demand for a more expansive and inclusive public sphere. Ex-Shin Bet Head Yuval Diskin has, for example, specifically challenged Netanyahu’s leadership and his tendency to facilitate “closed forum” meetings where “...Netanyahu, Barak and Lieberman, sat and smoked cigars in front of everyone”<sup>224</sup>. Hansen argues that Habermasian dialogue and the politics of persuasion are not the entirety of what leads to a successful desecuritization, rather what is necessary is further shattering the *friend-enemy distinction*.

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<sup>221</sup>Hansen, Lene. “Reconstructing Desecuritization : the Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply it,”530

<sup>222</sup>Hansen, Lene. “Reconstructing Desecuritization : the Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply it,”532

<sup>223</sup>Hansen, Lene. “Reconstructing Desecuritization : the Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply it,”532

<sup>224</sup>Diskin: Netanyahu unreliable leader, 'possessed' by Iran”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 01/04/2013.Web

What this means is the reconstitution of the “Self and its enemy” so that the performative act of “speaking security” is no longer associated with that enemy. This is premised on the notion that politics involves judgments and normative concepts of friendship and enmity, making the basis of any coherent political identity deeply antagonistic<sup>225</sup>. In Israel, it is possible to observe the emergence of a political community challenging both the constructed Selfness and Otherness of this debate by critically questioning the need for Israel to see the initiation of strong securitizing discourse in response to every enemy threatening it. Case in point are the statements made by Israeli opposition leader Shaul Mofaz ramping up the "hysteria" over Iran in order to deflect attention from Israel's social problems”, mainly referencing the need to focus on arriving at a peace settlement with the Palestinians.

Mofaz’s words have been seconded by Olmert and Diskin, leveling criticisms of Netanyahu’s “irresponsible leadership” and his “using” the issue of Iran to maintain his party’s position. What these statements coupled with objections to Netanyahu’s negligence towards settlement expansion and the ignoring of local issues such as poverty and the expulsion of almost thirty thousand Bedouins, embody a demand to “replace” the enmity established surrounding a dominant articulation of the Other with more existentially important issues<sup>226</sup>. “Replacement” desecuritization, thus reflects the logic that an issue’s “fading” from the mainstream “security discourse” will necessitate its replacement with a different and more existentially pressing issue<sup>227</sup>.

Another illustration of this replacement desecuritization lies in civil society institutions that dispute the Otherness of Iran and the antagonistic relationship such a discourse looks to establish. Security Studies scholar David Campbell argues that at its core

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<sup>225</sup>Hansen, Lene. “Reconstructing Desecuritization : the Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply it,”543

<sup>226</sup>Hansen, Lene. “Reconstructing Desecuritization : the Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply it,”541

<sup>227</sup>Hansen, Lene. “Reconstructing Desecuritization : the Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply it,”541

every society's concept of 'self' is intimately bound up in similar concepts of defining the 'other' – the enemy<sup>228</sup>. Social movements, such as the *IsraellovesIran* and *One Jerusalem* projects, have emerged to reveal the lack of hatred and disdain between the two populations, and instead reveal a desire within both camps to dispel enmity in favor of statements and promises of love<sup>229</sup>. *IsraellovesIran* and *One Jerusalem* have established a hub of online contestation to the idea that an Iranian person is threatening to an Israeli, and vice versa. At its core is the idea that peace must adopt “new tools” in Israel, and create a venue where Otherness can be transformed into sameness using technology and 'directness'. 'Directness' refers to the use of tools of picture-sharing, chatting, and sharing of personal stories to shatter the layers of rhetoric that have allowed for the presence of a friend-enemy distinction to take root. Political activism and wide-ranging popular support for these movements raise the more existentially threatening possibility of what if 'we' Israelis are like 'them' Iranians?

The processes of securitization and desecuritization bring into focus some important gaps in CSS, including the lack of focus on the politics of consent, as articulated by Salter, as well as, its transition towards the politics precluding an issues' desecuritization, as articulated by Aradau. This paper contributes to narrowing this gap by arguing that the politics of consent are neither implicit nor instantaneous, but more importantly take on a fluid and non-linear shape requiring a more process-oriented understanding of the concept.

A series of conclusions emerge from the case of the Iranian existential threat in Israel. First, the attempted securitization by the Netanyahu camp, has neither been “one-directional” nor successfully accepted by multiple audiences. In seeing securitization as an process determined inter-subjectively between speaker and audience, this analysis of the

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<sup>228</sup>Hansen, Lene. “Reconstructing Desecuritization : the Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply it,”542

<sup>229</sup>“A Bridge of Communication Between the People in the Middle East : Peace Factory”. Israel Loves Iran.Web.

Iranian nuclear issue in Israel provides prime example of the non-linear shape of securitization as a **process** without a definitive endpoint. Secondly Salter and Balzacq's understanding of securitization offers an important emphasis on the transformative politics underlying an issues movement into the realm of security, emergency, fear and enmity. The delineation of these two types of political environments provides a clear answer to why the Iranian nuclear threat has not been successfully securitized in that Netanyahu's dominant Iranian threat discourse has not been able to establish a retreat to the politics of *exception*. In this way, an issue is able to bounce back and forth in between a securitized and desecuritized state, or as the case of Israel has shown a new political actor or community is able to block its securitization.

This challenge takes the shape of what Hansen identifies as a counter discourse to the dominant Self discourse, in this case the language of enmity and threat surrounding Iranian nuclear ambitions. As Ben Meir notes, this has allowed for an "unprecedented level of public debate" to ensue, incorporating actors from the political eschelon, former military generals and advisors, as well as, the former heads of security intelligence institutions. These actors have constituted a new political identity in challenging an Israeli Self whose main ingredient for survival is the "reproduction of discourses of insecurity" which drive narratives motivated by existentially threatening enemies. This new political identity further challenges one of the most interesting social features of Israeli decision making in the realm of security, in terms of the closed forum of security experts which are able permitted access into the innerworkings of constructing national security. What the ex-security experts present within the camp of dissenters to the Iranian threat discourse look to shatter is a generational consensus among Israeli political leadership that the Prime Minister and Defense Minister are given full-license to construct the next set of Israel's existential enemies without check or balance.

This analysis further addresses the shape of desecuritization, and why the specific application of Hansen's "*replacement desecuritization*" marks an important political

juncture in Israel. This juncture demonstrates the breaking of: 1) a path dependency in how public debates on security issues are conducted, and 2) a deeper pattern of constructing its current identity on the basis of the politics of enmity and insecurity. It is therefore the hope of the author to not only offer a coherent understanding of how the theoretical concepts of securitization and desecuritization carry a great deal of congruence to the case specified, but to more importantly render a critical explanation of why the dynamics underlying these processes have resulted in a unique instance of extended public deliberation and a forced return to democratic public debate. Desecuritization in this case has taken the empirical shape of a challenge to the viability of Israel's political leadership, in the form of statements from within and outside the political echelon, and a more long-term grassroots challenge from varying civil society outlets such as *IranlovesIsrael*. This group has initiated a counter-discourse, and thereby constitutes an identity in direct opposition to the Self projected through the dominant Iranian threat narrative. These social groups would like to revise the logic of enmity and insecurity projected within Netanyahu's Iranian threat discourse, and replace it with the concept of mutual acceptance of sameness through the logic that "Once you see your enemy as a human being similar to yourself, expressing his love and understanding...he doesn't hate you as years of propaganda succeed to make you believe... then you will be ready for peace".

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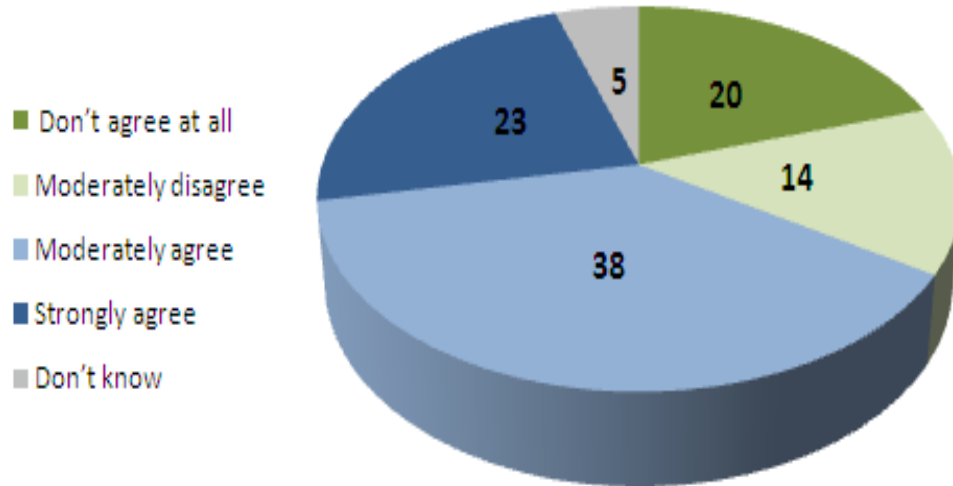
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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: THE PEACE INDEX

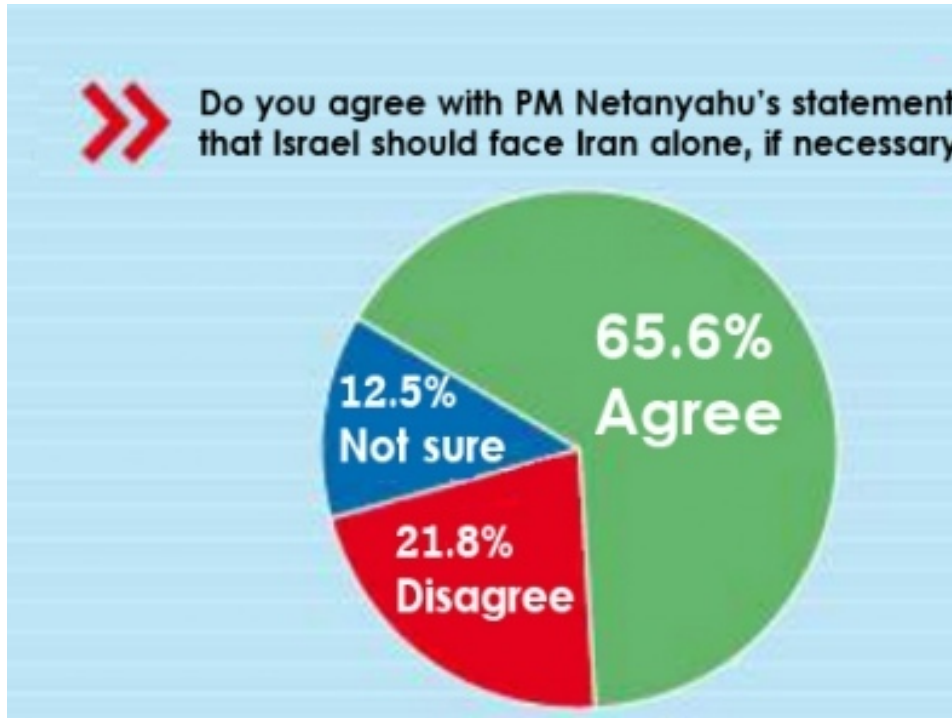


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Question: “ Some think it will be impossible to prevent Iran from going nuclear in the long term, and therefore believe that Israel should come to terms with this reality and devise a security strategy based on the assumption that Israel is not the only nuclear state in the region. Do you agree or disagree with this approach?” (% of Jewish public)

APPENDIX 2: ISRAEL HAYOM. "POLL: TWO-THIRDS OF ISRAELI JEWS BACK UNILATERAL IRAN STRIKE"(04/10/2013)



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APPENDIX 3: DOMINANCE & COUNTER-DISOURSE IN 2012

