



Israel's Holocaust Analogy towards Iran's Nuclear Program: An Analysis of Benjamin Netanyahu's Political Speeches, 2009-2015

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Introduction

Over the last decade, the expanding nuclear program of the Islamic Republic of Iran has become the most prominent security concern of the State of Israel. Israeli political leaders frequently refer to the Jewish past in Europe when it comes to the Iranian nuclear threat, but no leader does that more consistently than the recently reelected Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In his political speeches on Iran's nuclear program Netanyahu does not refrain from the use of Holocaust analogies to warn for the existential threat Israel is facing once Iran is capable of producing nuclear weapons. On the contrary, it has become the most controversial recurring feature in his speeches. More than any of his predecessors, Netanyahu draws on comparisons between Iran and Nazi-Germany to put the nuclear threat on the top of his political agenda.¹ According to political scientist Amir Lupovici, since Netanyahu's second term as Prime Minister (2009-present), Iran's nuclear program has been successfully securitized, meaning that the framing of the issue as "existential threat" is publicly accepted and enables the Israeli government to take extraordinary measures if needed.² A March 2013 opinion poll conducted by the Dahaf Institute indicated that 75 percent of the Israelis considered a nuclear-armed Iran as an existential threat. Another poll in November 2013 by the daily *Israel Hayom* showed that 52 percent supported a unilateral strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, while 27 percent opposed such measures.³

Repeatedly it has been stated that Israel cannot afford itself to take any risks regarding Iran, but what is particularly interesting is that Holocaust references are so strongly and frequently expressed by Netanyahu as means to find support for such measures or perhaps to serve other political goals. The fact that the Holocaust is such a delicate theme, not only in the Israeli society, but also across Europe, raises the question why Netanyahu systematically refers in his public speeches for the international community to the Second World War every time the nuclear program of Iran is discussed. A closer analysis of the rhetoric used by Netanyahu in the international political arena, primarily in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, when the Iranian nuclear question is addressed, can reveal his personal intentions, but can also shed light

¹ Yehuda Ben Meir, 'The Israeli Public Debate on Preventing a Nuclear Iran,' in: Anan Kurz and Shlomo Brom (eds.), *Strategic Survey for Israel 2012-2013* (Tel Aviv, 2013) 234-5. Official publication by Institute for National Security Studies (INSS); Shmuel Nili, 'The Nuclear (and the) Holocaust: Israel, Iran, and the Shadows of Auschwitz,' *Journal of Strategic Security* 4:1 (2011) 44.

² Amir Lupovici, 'Securitization Climax: Putting the Iranian Nuclear Project at the Top of the Israeli Public Agenda,' *Foreign Policy Analysis* (2014) 1-2.

³ A database of Israeli polls on Iran up to 2013 can be found here: 'Israeli Public Opinion Polls: Attitudes Toward Iran' [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society & Culture/ispoiran.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Society%20&%20Culture/ispoiran.html) (accessed on 20 June 2015).

on the nature of Israel's security policy and the central place of the Holocaust in the Israeli society. My main question is therefore: *how does the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu consistently make use of Holocaust analogies in his political speeches on Iran's nuclear program and what can these comparisons reveal about his political goals, Israel's security policy and the Israeli-Iranian relationship?* In order to get a good understanding of the content of his speeches, I first provide a brief introduction into his personal background, worldview and perceptions on Israel's security needs in the Middle East and on international terrorism. Second, I continue with a historical overview of the Israeli-Iranian relations after the 1979 Iranian Revolution to explain how the nuclear issue became the central divide between both states and how former Israeli political leaders have expressed their concerns. Third, I set out a theoretical framework based on rhetorical and discourse analysis, providing linguistic methods for analyzing political speeches. The final part is devoted to the analysis of his speeches on Iran's nuclear program between 2009 and 2015. While this essay mainly concentrates on Netanyahu's annual speeches for the UN General Assembly, to get the full scope of his strategy towards various audiences some of his addresses at other occasions in Israel and the United States are also discussed.

Netanyahu's Worldview and Perceptions on Israel's Security Needs

Netanyahu's ideological orientation that formed his political beliefs and convictions as Prime Minister of Israel was very much shaped by his secular Revisionist Zionist family. From the Revisionist ideology, on which basis the Likud party was founded in 1973, Netanyahu adopted certain key concepts on peace and security which became the main pillars of his domestic and foreign policy. Most influential was his father Benzion Netanyahu (1910-2012), who was an active member and strong supporter of the Revisionist movement that strived for the conquest of Greater Israel. He was sent by its intellectual founder Ze'ev Jabotinsky (1880-1940) as his deputy to the United States in the 1930s to lobby for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Central to the Revisionist ideology up to May 1948 and after was the maximalist territorial approach of a Jewish state that comprised both sides of the Jordan River, which required an armed struggle of the Yishuv with the Arabs and the British mandate.⁴ Once the State of Israel was established, Revisionists rejected the so-called "Jewish naiveté," what they perceived as one of the main explanations for the Holocaust, and urged more than the Labor Zionist

⁴ Ben Caspit and Ilan Kfir, *Netanyahu : The Road to Power* (Toronto, 1998) 17-20; Yossi Klein Halevi, 'Bibi's Political Inheritance', *Tablet*, 1 May 2012: <http://tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/98279/bibis-political-inheritance> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

leadership for the need of a superior Jewish army in the Middle East that according to Jabotinsky's famous essay 'The Iron Wall' (1923) was not only able to defend the state, but could also force the Arab enemies into peace. The elder Netanyahu, who was an eminent historian in Jewish history, underlined this idea of Jewish self-defense implicitly in his study on the Inquisition, in which he stated that the Spanish anti-Semitism and persecution of Jews who had converted to Catholicism was in fact not different from the Jew-hatred in Nazi Germany in creating a racial theory to annihilate the defenseless Jewish people.⁵ It was amidst of such right-wing Zionist ideas and concepts of Greater Israel, the permanent Arab hostility against the State of Israel, and the recurring threat of anti-Semitism, that the younger Netanyahu grew up in Israel and the United States. Although he inherited this nationalist and realist mindset, he never became as ideologically motivated as his father or his predecessors in the Likud, most notably Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, but rather a pragmatist in Jabotinsky's spirit who for the sake of his own political survival was willing to make compromises on the party's Revisionist ideology.⁶

A turning point in his life was the death of his elder brother Jonathan, who was killed in the Israeli operation that rescued Jewish hostages in Entebbe (Uganda) on 4 July 1976. Since then Netanyahu's political ambition was born and several months later he founded the Jonathan Institute for the Study of International Terror in memory of his brother. This institute was aimed to create worldwide awareness for the need to combat international terrorism and to urge statesmen to develop effective counter-strategies. Netanyahu became soon an internationally recognized expert in terrorism, that along with his experience in public relations would pave his future career as UN ambassador, party leader of the Likud, and eventually as Israel's Prime Minister (since 1996).⁷ After the first two conferences on terrorism by the Jonathan Institute, Netanyahu edited the book *Terrorism: How the West Can Win* (1986), which comprised a collection of essays on anti-terror theory. The main assumptions in this book and his subsequent publication *Fighting Terrorism* (1995) were close if not identical to his present views on terrorism, although major shifts have taken place on the world scene since the 9/11 attacks. As early as the mid-1980s, Netanyahu claimed that modern terrorism was almost exclusively an

⁵ Zack Beauchamp, 'The ideas that define Benjamin Netanyahu', Vox, 16 March 2015:

<http://www.vox.com/2015/3/16/8220035/what-does-netanyahu-think> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

⁶ Avi Shlaim, 'The Likud in Power: The Historiography of Revisionist Zionism', *Israel Studies* 1:2 (1996) 292; Arye Naor, 'Hawks' Beaks', Doves' Feathers: Likud Prime Ministers Between Ideology and Reality', *Israel Studies* 10:3 (2005) 184-5.

⁷ Caspit and Kfir, *Netanyahu : The Road to Power*, 87-8; Shlaim, 'The Likud in Power', 290-1. Netanyahu was first elected in 1996 and served as Prime Minister until 1999. Ten years later, in 2009, he returned to office and was recently reelected in March 2015.

anti-Western phenomenon that was rooted in the totalitarian ideologies of radical Islam and communism which should be defeated by an international coalition of democratic states. He also stated that terrorism did not stem from social or political oppression, but was instead the collusion between dictatorial regimes and terrorist organizations to achieve political ends by means of violent acts against innocent people.⁸ By this narrow definition, terrorist groups were due to their use of inhuman methods of no interest in seeking freedom or independence but merely the “forerunners of tyranny” that acted in concert with dictatorships, which of course also framed the Palestinian terror attacks at the time as nothing but a ruthless *jihād* or holy war against Israel. In his second book Netanyahu already warned for Iran, which he saw by the mid-1990s as “one of the new propelling forces of international terrorism,” that with the capacity of building nuclear weapons would become even more dangerous.⁹ For the next two decades, this became his major concern in his foreign policy as Prime Minister and party leader of the Likud.

Netanyahu’s obsession with Iran’s nuclear program and support of terror reflects also his deep mistrust against the Arab states and his conviction that his main duty is to secure the fragile position of Israel in the Middle East. In his book *A Durable Peace : Israel and its Place Among the Nations* (2000) he explained the roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict from a historical perspective, yet not without presenting his own political and ideological agenda.¹⁰ According to Netanyahu, the Arab world is still dominated by ‘rogue regimes’ that hold a long record of state violence and have destabilized the Middle East for more than half a century. Arab regimes do not put any “limits to their violence” nor in “the means they choose to pursue it or in the victims they select as it targets.” Gas attacks have been used during several wars, by Gamal Abdel Nasser in Yemen in the early 1960s, by Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War, and more recently by the Assad regime in the Syrian Civil War in August 2013. Netanyahu further claimed that Arab state aggression was not limited to wars across the borders but was also applied domestically to Muslim citizens, while non-Arab or non-Muslim minorities fared no better or even worse. Minorities never got an equal standing in the Arab world and therefore have always been easy targets of persecution and discrimination.¹¹ While he acknowledged that this decades long record of violence and intolerance can be traced back to the colonial period and the arbitrary divisions of the European powers, the main cause for the terminal instability in the Middle East is the general crisis of political legitimacy. Arab regimes turned to violence

⁸ Shlaim, ‘The Likud in Power’, 290-2.

⁹ Benjamin Netanyahu, *Fighting Terrorism : How Democracies Can Defeat Domestic and International Terrorists* (New York, 1995) 8-9, 21-3, 56-8, 78-80.

¹⁰ Naor, ‘Likud Prime Ministers Between Ideology and Reality’, 176-8.

¹¹ Benjamin Netanyahu, *A Durable Peace : Israel and its Place Among the Nations* (New York, 2000) 99-108.

and suppressive techniques, because there was never a popular consensus on what constituted a legitimate Arab government. Moreover, the post-colonial Arab world developed a strong resentment against the Western world that culminated in both pan-Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism. It must be noted that non-Arab Iran fits into this thinking as well, since the Islamic revolutionaries overthrew the American-backed regime of the Shah in 1979, although they rejected the idea of pan-Arab nationalism. Pan-Arabism is here defined as the aspiration of Arab leaders to overcome the artificial Western borders and to achieve Arab unity, which has mainly failed because the nationalist regimes had different interests and also faced fierce competition from Islamic fundamentalism. The latter ideology is aimed to overthrow the secular Arab regimes and eventually to subjugate the entire world to Islam by force. The competition between the two led to the refusal of anything that did not fit into the model of a unitary Arab state or unified Islamic domain and “the rejection of all claims for political and religious independence by non-Arabs and non-Muslims.” Netanyahu claimed that this created the basic opposition in the Arab world against Israel and its Zionist foundations, which did not stem from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but was rooted in this ideological rejection of Jewish sovereignty in the Middle East. “The durability of the twin fanaticisms of pan-Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism,” he concluded, is therefore “the true core of conflict in the Middle East, and of much of the violence that emanates from that region to the rest of the world.”¹²

Netanyahu’s worldview and understanding of the unique vulnerable position of Israel in the Middle East is far from new, as former Israeli political leaders expressed similar views, but the focus in his national security policy has surely shifted more towards the wider struggle against terrorism and the need to block a nuclear Iran rather than to other issues. The Israeli security needs are generally based on a set of assumptions or constraints about the exceptional regional and international environment of Israel. Among these basic assumptions Zeev Maoz recognized the fundamental hostility of the Arab world, the asymmetrical relationship between Israel and the Arab states, the belief that the international community is not a reliable ally, the geographical and practical limitations of a small state in fighting wars, and finally, that peace can only be achieved by acceptance and not by reconciliation.¹³ In *A Durable Peace* Netanyahu claimed that the military power of Israel is of crucial importance to come to a longstanding peace with its Arab neighbors, because only when the Arab states realize that they cannot destroy the Jewish state nor benefit from conflict or boycotting they can accept its presence in

¹² Ibidem, 111, 115-33.

¹³ Zeev Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land : A Critical Analysis of Israel's Security & Foreign Policy* (Michigan, 2006) 7-17.

the Middle East.¹⁴ That also means that seeing the aforementioned constraints the military doctrine of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) is primarily based on the principles of cumulative deterrence, offensive operations, and fighting short and decisive wars. Besides military strength, however, Netanyahu contended that it was just as important to win the battle over public opinion, since propaganda had become the Arab's major tool of force against Israel. Arab regimes and terror organizations have used this instrument extensively to delegitimize the existence of the State of Israel and to call for its destruction. Netanyahu's numerous speeches on Iran's nuclear program testify to his conviction that shifting the public opinion is of crucial importance for Israel's security to get more international sympathy and support.¹⁵

The Israeli-Iranian Relations after the 1979 Revolution

Over the past decades, Israel's relations with Iran have deteriorated dramatically with heightening tensions over different issues, most notably Iran's nuclear program, support of terrorist groups and frequent anti-Israel statements. While the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran is definitely the most prominent concern of Israel's security establishment, it does not sufficiently explain what the reasons are for the political and ideological conflict that emerged between both states. According to the Iranian-American political scientist Trita Parsi, who wrote his dissertation on the history of Israeli-Iranian relations, there is practically no reason to assume that Israel and Iran are destined to clash with each other.¹⁶ Looking at the current tensions that receive overwhelming media attention, it is hard to imagine that there did not exist such intense conflict until the aftermath of the First Gulf War, rather the complete opposite. Before and after the Shah's fall during the 1979 Iranian Revolution, shared geo-political interests in the Middle East contributed to relatively good relations between Israel and Iran. As non-Arab states, they both perceived Saddam Hussein's Iraq as the greatest threat to their own national security and therefore enjoyed a natural alliance amidst of the other hostile Arab states. Once Hussein was defeated and the Soviet empire fell apart, the geopolitical outlook in the Middle East drastically changed and weakened the Israeli-Iranian relations. From the early 1990s, there was practically no common ground left to cooperate any longer and instead both states begun increasingly to see each other as strategic rivals. Parsi claims that this strategic

¹⁴ Netanyahu, *A Durable Peace*, 321-2, 361-2.

¹⁵ Ibidem, *A Durable Peace*, 372-8.

¹⁶ Tirat Parsi, 'Under the Veil of Ideology: The Israeli-Iranian Rivalry', Middle East Research and Information Project, 9 June 2006: <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero060906> (accessed on 20 June 2015). See also: RAND National Defense Research Institute, *Israel and Iran : A Dangerous Rivalry* (Santa Monica, Arlington and Pittsburgh, 2011) 1-3.

rivalry is a conflict for regional power and influence in the Middle East that does still exist today and is the hidden agenda behind most of the issues that have emerged between both states.¹⁷ It is precisely this transformation in Israeli-Iranian relations that is of our interest, because it sheds light on the historical context in which Israel's security policy on Iran's nuclear program was formulated and Netanyahu's speeches are embedded. The following part thus provides a chronological overview of three periods during which the Israeli-Iranian relationship altered: first, the period of *cooperation* from the 1979 Revolution until the end of the Cold War (1979-1991); second, the period of *alienation* when Israel attempted to make peace with the Palestinians and its neighboring Arab states (1991-2000); and third, the period of *open confrontation* over Iran's expanding nuclear program and support of anti-Israel terrorist groups (2000-present).

The period of cooperation between Israel and Iran started in the late 1950s, when both states faced the common threats of Soviet expansion in the Middle East and Nasser's campaign for pan-Arab unity after the Suez crisis. The Israeli-Iranian entente was encouraged by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, who formulated the 'periphery doctrine,' that called for close relations with non-Arab states such as Iran to counter-act the Arab opposition against Israel's right to exist. Although both states did not establish official diplomatic relations, their common security interests contributed to the build-up of economic and military relations. Iran made Israel less dependent on other Arab states with its oil export, which even continued during the Arab oil embargo of 1973, while in return Israel provided agricultural and military technology to Iran.¹⁸ By the early 1970s, major geopolitical changes in the Middle East put the entente under increased pressure, because Iran shifted its foreign policy to regional domination following the British withdrawal from the Persian Gulf, the Arab defeat in the 1967 War, and the end of the Egyptian-Soviet alliance. As the Egyptian threat to Iran diminished, the strongest military power in the region became Hussein's Iraq that formed close ties with the Soviet Union. In response, the Shah regime increased its military expenditures and sought rapprochement to the other Arab states. This also meant that in order for Iran to overcome the century-long Arab-Persian and Sunni-Shia divide, Tehran became very outspoken in the propaganda campaign against Israel.

¹⁷ Tirat Parsi, 'Israel-Iranian Relations Assessed: Strategic Competition from the Power Cycle Perspective', *Iranian Studies* 38:2 (2005) 254-9.

¹⁸ Tirat Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the United States* (New Haven and London, 2007) 20-5; RAND, *Israel and Iran*, 10-3.

After the power shift of the 1979 Revolution, the theocratic Shiite government led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini used strong anti-Israel propaganda to spread its message of political Islam and to advance Iran's status in the Arab world. In 1981, Khomeini even introduced an international Al-Quds Day at the end of the Ramadan to remind Muslims of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the Jewish control over the Holy City of Jerusalem. But the Ayatollah's attempts to win the hearts of the Arab populations bitterly failed, and further isolated the position of Iran.¹⁹ Yet for strategic reasons military cooperation between Iran and Israel continued beneath the surface. Well before the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), Prime Minister Menachem Begin supplied Iran with fighter planes and weaponry. Throughout the war, Israel's main objective was to prevent Iraq from advancing its power in the region and therefore Begin convinced Washington that it was crucial to lift the arms trade ban on Iran. In June 1981, the Israeli Air Force also struck the Iraqi nuclear reactor in Osirak, possibly with support of Iranian intelligence services, which was suspected of being used for the development of nuclear weapons. Despite Israel's military support, the rise of the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah, that fought with Iran's support against Israel during the First Libanon War (1982-85), promised that the ambiguous relationship with Khomeini's regime could not last for long. By the early 1990s, Iraq's defeat in the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union took the common security interests away and consequently Israeli political leaders began to regard the Iranian periphery, including Hezbollah, as their main threat.²⁰

The period of post-Cold War alienation coincided with the start of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and meant the definitive end of Ben-Gurion's periphery doctrine towards Iran. Iran was no longer needed to balance the threat of Hussein's Iraq, whose army had been decimated, nor from the Palestinians and neighboring Arab states with whom Israel sought peace. Israel's security establishment became instead increasingly suspicious about Iran's long-range missile program, that was initiated after the traumatic experiences of the eight year long war against Iraq when Tehran was targeted with Scud missiles. The Islamic Republic was at this time miles away from the capability of producing nuclear weapons, although its civilian nuclear program was resumed since the late 1980s.²¹ Nevertheless, the leaders of the Labor government, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Minister of Foreign Affairs Shimon Peres, already began to define Iran as a global threat and sought for its containment to pursue their

¹⁹ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 29-48, 97-102.

²⁰ Ibidem, 106-9, 129-31, 139-45. For an overview of Hezbollah's attacks against Israeli military targets during the First Libanon War see: Robert Pape, *Dying to Win : The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York, 2005) 129-39.

²¹ RAND, *Israel and Iran*, 21-2.

own goals in the Arab-Israeli peace process. They depicted Iran as a fanatical and irrational regime that aspired regional domination. Both Israeli leaders took every opportunity to convince the Israeli public and the international community that action was required against Iran and its anti-Israel ideology. In October 1992, Peres said on the French television that “Iran is the greatest threat and greatest problem in the Middle East (..) because it seeks the nuclear option while holding a highly dangerous stance of extreme religious militantism.” Two months later, Rabin told the Knesset that Israel’s “struggle against murderous Islamic terror” was “meant to awaken the world which is lying in slumber” to the dangers of Shia fundamentalism. These statements suggested that Iran was expanding its power, but Parsi claims along with Israeli scholars, such as Israel Shahak, that this was not true. It was not until the mid-1990s that Iran had become a major sponsor of Palestinian rejectionist groups in the West Bank and Gaza.²² Nonetheless, Iranian backed anti-Israeli terrorism already started in March 1992, when Hezbollah bombed the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, a month after Israel’s assassination of Hezbollah leader Abbas al-Mussawi.²³ While the Rabin-Peres campaign against Iran was thus not completely unfounded, it was primarily launched to convince the Israeli public of the idea that the Palestinians were no longer terrorists, but that Yasser Arafat’s Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) had become a serious partner for peace. A new and greater threat was needed to erase the Palestinian threat out of the Israeli collective mind. Even so, the Arab states would also be more willing to make peace with Israel if they “felt more threatened by Iran’s fundamentalist ideology than by Israel’s policies and nuclear arsenal.”²⁴

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process and the Rabin-Peres campaign against Iran drove a further wedge between Israel and Iran. Iran opposed the peace process from the start, as it knew that if it would succeed it would lead to its own isolation in the Middle East. By contrast, Rabin believed that a peace treaty with the Palestinians and Arab states could bring Israel into a better position to deal with the Iranian threat. But the dream for peace shattered when Rabin was assassinated in Tel Aviv on 4 November 1995.²⁵ A wave of Palestinian terror attacks against Israeli civilians followed in the spring, which further undermined the peace process and

²² Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 158-67. The rejectionist Palestinian groups were the radical militant groups who rejected the Ten-Point Program that was adopted by the PLO in 1974, because they wanted to continue the hardline policy against Israel.

²³ Ibidem, 177-8; Israel Shahak, *Open Secrets : Israeli Foreign and Nuclear Policies* (London, 1997) 82-5. Both Parsi and Shahak noted that the Iranian involvement in the Hezbollah attack on the Israeli embassy in Argentina has never been proved, but they argued that the attack reinforced the perception in Israel that Tehran had entered the stage of global terrorism (against Israel) and was used by Rabin and Peres in their campaign against Iran.

²⁴ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 167-70; Parsi, ‘Israel-Iranian Relations Assessed’, 262-3.

²⁵ Parsi, ‘Israel-Iranian Relations Assessed’, 259-65.

paved the way for Netanyahu's election victory in June 1996. Unlike Peres, Netanyahu did not put the blame for the attacks on Iran, but solely on the Palestinians. His Likud government did not attempt to resume the peace process and shifted its attention instead towards the internal threat of Palestinian terrorism, which brought a brief relaxation in the Israeli-Iranian relations. Initially, Netanyahu believed that the former Labor government had damaged Israel's relations in the Middle East and that the demonization of Iran might provoke more terror attacks. But this proved to be a short-lived policy as Iran's missile and nuclear program still made progress. The Likud government was at this stage more concerned about the conventional missile program than the nuclear program, which was far more complicated, while the development of ballistic missiles by Iran could pose a serious threat to Israel in the nearby future. After more than nine months of relative silence in Israeli foreign politics on Iran, in early 1997 Netanyahu started to use the same rhetoric as Rabin and Peres, wherein he referred to Iran's global ambitions and ideology of its clergy.²⁶ The Israeli-Iranian relations deteriorated further following several clashes between the IDF and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, that led to the Israeli military withdrawal in April-May 2000, and the subsequent outbreak of the Second Intifada (2000-2005) after Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount on 28 September 2000.²⁷

Since the new millennium Israel's policy on Iran shifted from alienation towards open confrontation due to two major developments that were of great concern of Israel's society and security establishment. The first development was Iran's financial and military support of anti-Israel terrorist groups, most notably Hezbollah and Hamas, during the Second Intifada and the subsequent wars in Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza since 2008-2009.²⁸ Ayatollah Ali Khamenei also expressed his sinister political support for Palestinian suicide attacks in a speech he delivered in May 2002: "The people in Palestine must continue their opposition, praise to Allah, just as they have persevered until now. The climax of this opposition can be seen in the martyrdom seeking operations. Self-martyrdom is the pinnacle and symbol of human dignity: the youth, the boy and girl, who are willing to sacrifice their lives while serving the interests of their country and origin."²⁹ Both Hezbollah and Hamas became ever since not only more professionalized and well equipped with modern weaponry, but also extremely effective in their ability to attack and terrorize Israeli civilians, so that until today they proved very hard for Israel

²⁶ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 196-201, 206-10.

²⁷ Ibidem, 214-22.

²⁸ Matthew Livitt, 'Iran's Support for Terrorism in the Middle East', The Washington Institute, 25 July 2012: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/testimony/LevittTestimony20120725.pdf> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

²⁹ Shaul Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and the Palestinian Terror* (New Brunswick, 2005) 102.

to fight against. The second major development was the rapid expansion and advancement of Iran's nuclear program that evoked an international nuclear crisis in which Israel along with the United States became one of the principal and most outspoken actors. While it was previously not clear if Iran really pursued nuclear weapons, the discovery of the secret nuclear plants in Natanz and Arak in August 2002 strengthened the presumption that the nuclear program did not only serve peaceful means. Tehran's covert nuclear activities violated the 1974 Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that demanded full transparency about all nuclear facilities.

Most concerned of course was Israel whose Prime Minister Sharon bluntly told the American President George W. Bush about the "unacceptable risk of a nuclear Holocaust against Israel" and requested him to take adequate action. As Sharon framed Iran as the most serious threat to Israel, rumors spread that it was not unlikely that he would consider a unilateral attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, as had been done before in Iraq in 1981.³⁰ In addition, he appointed Meir Dagan as Director of the Mossad (2002-2011), Israel's national intelligence agency, and tasked him to "head the efforts to prevent Iran's nuclear program," that near the end of his term would even include several assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists, for which the Mossad obviously never claimed responsibility.³¹ The American invasion of Iraq in March 2003, which was justified by the Bush administration on the false ground that Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, did Iranian leaders realize that they needed to bring the escalating nuclear crisis under control; Sharon already had suggested Washington for a follow-up war against Iran. Iran committed itself in negotiations with the European Union (EU)³², to the immediate suspension of uranium enrichment and enhanced access to its nuclear facilities by IAEA inspectors, which was formalized in the Paris Agreement of November 2004.³³

While the Iranian compliance with the EU initiative raised hopes for the future, the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as President of Iran in August 2005 set the clock back and brought the nuclear crisis into a major standoff that would lead to international sanctions against

³⁰ David Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran : The Birth of an Atomic State* (London and New York, 2012) 175-82; Jim Hoagland, 'Israel's Red Flag on Iran', *Jewish World Review*, 13 August 2003: http://www.jewishworldreview.com/0803/hoagland_2003_08_13.php3 (accessed on 20 June 2015).

³¹ RAND, *Israel and Iran*, 23; Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran*, 269-71. For the Mossad's involvement in the assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists see: Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman, *Spies Against Armageddon : Inside Israel's Secret Wars* (Sea Cliff, 2014); Julian Borgher and Kamali Dehghan, 'Covert war against Iran's nuclear aims takes chilling turn', *The Guardian*, 5 December 2010: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/05/iran-nuclear-experts-killings> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

³² On behalf of the EU negotiated France, Germany and the United Kingdom, the so-called 'EU-3,' with Iran.

³³ Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran*, 199-210; Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 239-40.

Iran. New negotiations with the EU to resume uranium enrichment under international auspices after two years of suspension failed, so that Tehran decided to abandon the Paris Agreement. Under the presidency of Ahmadinejad the nuclear program further expanded and in August 2006 the heavy water reactor for the production of plutonium was opened in Arak.³⁴ Meanwhile, Ahmadinejad adopted an unprecedented anti-Semitic and hostile policy towards Israel that provoked many of the conflicts that would appear over the following decade. At various public occasions, including at meetings of the UN General Assembly, Ahmadinejad referred to the Holocaust as a myth that was invented by the Western powers, questioned the legitimacy of the State of Israel, and repeatedly stated that Israel should “be wiped off the map.” As historian Avner Cohen explained, such statements were taken very seriously by the Israeli public, that understood Ahmadinejad’s rhetoric as a true desire of the Iranian regime to destroy Israel, which was seen as an even more immediate threat in the context of Iran’s nuclear ambitions.³⁵

Although sanctions were implemented by the UN since December 2006, Israeli leaders found the diplomatic efforts not sufficient to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons and therefore considered other options. A fierce debate arose in Israel’s security establishment about the option to strike Iran’s nuclear facilities, which was however not so easy. Iran’s nuclear program encompassed multiple sites throughout the country that were well protected, some deep underground, and which exact locations were not all known by the Israeli intelligence.³⁶ Although Steven Simon claimed that the Israeli Air Force was at least capable of striking the major sites in Isfahan, Natanz and Arak, there were also major constraining factors, including operational risks and American opposition, that might prevent Israel from attacking.³⁷ The Bush administration was alarmed by these plans and offered Israel instead more intelligence sharing and support for cyber-attacks on the computer systems at the Natanz plant, which was perceived as the main area for any possible weapon ambitions. A shift took place in the Israeli policy on Iran, which no longer only focused on diplomacy to increase international pressure, but also adopted the strategy of direct actions to setback the Iranian nuclear program, including the use of cyber-attacks and assassinations of nuclear scientists. The effect of such actions remained however limited as the nuclear program still moved forward and showed that the solution for the nuclear crisis still needed to be found on the political level.³⁸ With the inauguration of the

³⁴ Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran*, 216-21, 242.

³⁵ Avner Cohen, ‘Israel: A Sui Generis Proliferator’, in: Mathiah Alagappa (ed.), *The Long Shadow: Nuclear Weapons and Security in 21st Century Asia* (Stanford, 2008) 260.

³⁶ Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran*, 238-40.

³⁷ Steven Simon, ‘An Israeli Attack on Iran’, *Contingency Planning Memorandum No. 5* (The Council on Foreign Relations, November 2009) 1-4.

³⁸ Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran*, 264-79.

more moderate President Hassan Rouhani in June 2013, Iran finally adopted a more flexible approach and sought effectively for a compromise on its nuclear program so that the international community would lift some of the crippling sanctions that had taken a serious toll on the Iranian economy. Current negotiations between Iran and the so-called ‘P5+1,’ that includes the permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, but excludes Israel, have so far resulted in a framework agreement that sets clear limits on Iran’s nuclear program. Netanyahu, who since 2009 is leading the diplomatic offensive against Iran, called the nascent agreement in early April 2015 “a very bad deal” that does not enough to dismantle Iran’s nuclear infrastructure nor to stop “its aggression in the region, its terror worldwide and its calls and actions to annihilate the state of Israel.”³⁹

Methodology for Analyzing Political Speeches

A political speech can be defined as “a coherent stream of spoken language that is usually prepared for delivery to an audience for a purpose on a political occasion.”⁴⁰ Speakers in the political arena often use speeches to advance their own political interests, to influence the decision-making process and to convince the audience of their political ideas. Speeches are considered as powerful means to influence the minds of recipients and therefore deserve the attention of academia. Over the last decades theoretical frameworks of political speeches were mainly developed within the disciplines of linguistics and communication science, but there has also been a growing interest among historians and political scientists to study the historical, political and social context of political speeches. The wide scope of analytical tools and theoretical concepts that have become available, has made it possible to analyze and question different features of political speeches. Since there does not exist a single theoretical framework to analyze speeches, my intention is to explain here some analytical tools and concepts that can better help to understand the context, content and political aims of Netanyahu’s speeches on Iran’s nuclear program, and in particular his frequent use of Holocaust imagery. One needs to realize that Netanyahu addresses various audiences with his speeches at different occasions, while the mass media also reproduce practically all his speeches and select certain speech fragments. Moreover, the rhetorical language of Netanyahu’s speeches is also part of a

³⁹ Tom McCarthy, ‘Netanyahu continues attack on Iran nuclear agreement: it’s ‘a very bad deal’’, *The Guardian*, 5 April 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/05/israel-netanyahu-attack-iran-nuclear-framework-agreement> (accessed on 20 June 2015). See also: Shlomo Brom, ‘Israel and the Negotiations on Iran’s Nuclear Program’, in: Emily B. Landau and Anat Kurz (eds.), *The Interim Deal on the Iranian Nuclear Program: Toward a Comprehensive Solution?* (Tel Aviv, 2014) 69-72.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Charteris-Black, *Analysing Political Speeches : Rhetoric, Discourse and Metaphor* (New York, 2014) xiii.

longer political tradition and discourse among Israeli and international political leaders that dealt with issues of terrorism, national security and proliferation of nuclear weapons. Taking this into account, the multi-layered approach of speech criticism, that was proposed by the German linguist Martin Breisigl, allows us to analyze these different aspects. His approach combines three areas of speech criticism that draws upon rhetorical theory, political science, and critical discourse analysis to analyze the functions and aims, the persuasive rhetorical strategies, and the political discourse of speeches.⁴¹

The first area of speech criticism evaluates the functions and aims of speeches and indicates whether these are linked to positive criteria, such as sincerity, informativity, plausibility and convincingness, or to negative criteria, such as manipulation, demagoguery, agitation, propaganda and defamation. Speech analysts first need to define the type of speech. Breisigl categorized speeches by the three political dimensions of polity, policy and politics. Speeches that focus on polity aim to express the values of a political community and belong to the so-called 'epideictic genre' of speeches that are held during ceremonies and formal events. Ceremonial speeches are for example commemorative speeches, memorial speeches, anniversary speeches, speeches of consolation and laudatory speeches. Each particular type of speech can have multiple functions. Commemorative speeches, such as Netanyahu's addresses at the Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel, can contain functions of consolation, admonition, promise and teaching lessons that might identify the audience with the speaker's message. Speeches strongly relating to policy are mainly concerned with the formulation and justification of political tasks, aims and programs and belong to the deliberative genre. Amongst such speeches are inaugural speeches, ministerial speeches, speeches of resignation and appointment, and debate speeches. Debate speeches in the parliament, ministry, party or international bodies aim to legitimize specific policies, to present political positions against others, and to form attitudes and opinions. These speeches may also fit into the last category of politics. Speeches focus here primarily on the political process and are used as means to advance political interests, to gain political power and to assert oneself against political opponents in order to make certain policies possible. Within this category we also find election speeches and TV addresses. To further define the exact aims and functions of speeches one also needs to take into account the background and position of the speaker, the occasion, the addressees, and the form and topic of the speech.⁴²

⁴¹ Martin Breisigl, 'Rhetoric of Political Speeches', in: Ruth Wodak and Veronika Koller, *Handbook for Communication in the Public Sphere* (Berlin, 2008) 261-3.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 244-59.

The second area of speech criticism analyzes the persuasive rhetorical strategies that political orators use in their speeches to persuade the audience to adopt their political thoughts and beliefs. Persuasive strategies are defined as “the range of options from which a speaker selects in deciding on an appropriate tactic or combination of tactics for persuasion in a given situation.”⁴³ Speeches usually combine various means of persuasion and types of argumentation. The selection of particular rhetorical strategies by political actors depends on the given rhetorical situation and their own preferences, but might also be influenced by cultural standards, that predispose certain rhetorical styles. This implies that in cross-cultural settings the effect of certain strategies may be different, so that the orator must be well aware of his particular choices.⁴⁴ As political speeches are in general more freely organized than other speeches, they seldom contain clear separated sections of introduction, narration, argumentation, and conclusion. This means that rhetorical strategies can be applied to different parts of the speech and can sometimes overlap. According to classical rhetorical theory, political actors apply rhetorical strategies in their speeches to appeal to the audience in three different modes of persuasion: to *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Appeals to *ethos* are used to let the audience identify or sympathize with the character of the speaker, for instance, through his honesty, charisma or authority, as means of what is called ‘image management.’ Such identification is invoked when “someone claims expertise, formal qualifications or direct experience of the matter under discussion.” Appeals to *pathos* are types of argument based on the emotional involvement of the audience. Political actors appeal to emotions of anger, pity or fear to provide the motivation for political action. Such appeals can be used against an opponent party and be embedded in a particular political discourse. Lastly, speakers appeal to *logos* or the rationality of the public to offer logical justifications for their claim or thesis.⁴⁵ Such justifications are based on demonstrative reasoning in which facts and figures are presented. To what extent political orators appeal to each mode of persuasion depends on the occasion, their specific aims and the dominance of a particular political discourse on the subject in which these modes are accepted.

Having explained the different modes of persuasion, political actors can use different rhetorical strategies of persuasion in their speeches. According to the American linguist Barbara Johnstone, we can distinguish three rhetorical strategies, that are called quasi-logical, presen-

⁴³ Barbara Johnstone, ‘Linguistic Strategies and Cultural Styles for Persuasive Discourse’, in: Stella Ting-Toomey and Felipe Korzenny (eds.), *Language, Communication, and Culture: Current Directions* (Beverly Hills, 1989) 143.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 150-4.

⁴⁵ Alan Finlayson, ‘From Beliefs to Arguments: Interpretive Methodology and Rhetorical Political Analysis’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9:4 (2007) 557-8.

tation and analogy. Quasi-logical persuasion is unlike logical argumentation, not based on facts, but on selective assumptions and techniques that appear to resemble demonstrative reasoning. Such arguments include those involving incompatibility, definition, reciprocity, division, comparison, and probability. Quasi-logical expressions use the structure and vocabulary of formal logic, so that speakers create the “rhetorical impression that their arguments are logically incontrovertible.” Presentational persuasion encompasses the techniques that are used to sway the public and to get hearers and readers involved. Johnstone noted that the goal of this strategy is “to make one’s claim maximally present in the audience’s consciousness, by repeating it, paraphrasing it, and calling aesthetic attention to it.” The different techniques that orators can use in their speeches vary from parallel clauses, poetic alliteration and imagery to repeated references to the present. Speakers using these techniques tend to repeat their claims in different parallel and poetic wordings, while they make these present to the public by using active verbs (like: to see, to look, to behold) and ‘*deixis*’ or terms that point to time, place or situation (like: here, now, this) of the issue that is discussed. The third persuasive strategy is analogy which is a form of reasoning employing comparative or parallel cases. Analogies are explicit comparisons between past events or established ideas and current issues aimed to teach or remind the audience of certain time-tested values. Speakers can use stories as analogies to draw lessons from the past or to clarify difficult ideas with familiar historical examples. Such stories are usually chronologically structured and thereby appear to make logical connections between past and current events. But since analogies focus exclusively on the similar attributes between events or ideas, they neglect the differences between cases that can overpower the similarities. The choice of political actors for either of the rhetorical strategies might depend on the communicative patterns within a particular culture. Whereas quasi-logical persuasion acknowledges the supremacy of ideas and institutions in decision-making, presentational and analogical persuasions assign instead more meaning to the influence of individuals and their ability to sway the public respectively with rhythmic recurrent language and traditional stories.⁴⁶

The third area of speech criticism is concerned with the meaning and functions of political discourse in speeches. Political actors use language as means of conveying their political agenda, which suggests that the choice of language in speeches is never neutral but manipulated for specific political effect. As they usually control and contribute to the linguistic construction of political discourses, they use speeches and other means of communication to

⁴⁶ Johnstone, ‘Linguistic Strategies and Cultural Styles for Persuasive Discourse’, 145-50.

convey discourses to the wider public. A discourse is “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world that involves a limited number of statements and words (..) which give meaning to experiences from a particular perspective.” Discourses are composed of groups of related statements about a subject that are based on particular sets of institutional practices, assumptions, beliefs, forms of knowledge and political and cultural narratives.⁴⁷ This means that discourses are selective modes of representation of politics, that may distort reality or exclude undesirable references to reality for specific political purposes. When such assumptions and beliefs become widely accepted by the recipients of discourse, one can speak of the creation of a “hegemonic regime of truth.”⁴⁸ Therefore, the analysis of political discourse in speeches attempts to reveal the means by which language choice is manipulated for political purposes and to uncover the underlying ideologies that control the (dominant) political discourse.⁴⁹ According to the British political scientist Richard Jackson, the critical analysis of political discourse in speeches or other texts proceeds into two stages. The first stage entails the close examination of the key terms, assumptions, narratives and arguments deployed in speeches. It seeks to discover what linguistic choices in vocabulary, grammar, syntax and sentence construction have been made to accentuate particular assumptions and beliefs. The second stage goes beyond this primary textual analysis and sheds light on the relationship between discourse, power and social impact. On the one hand, it looks for internal contradictions, oversimplifications, mistakes and misconceptions in speeches and exposes the events and perspectives that are neglected or ignored by the elite within the overall discourse. It challenges dominant interpretations of reality and shows that there are alternative views possible. On the other hand, it reflects on the broader political and ethical consequences or ideological effects of the representations enunciated by the discourse. This includes critique on the functional elements in discourse to structure for example primary subject positions, accepted knowledge, and legitimate policy responses; to exclude and delegitimize alternative approaches; or to naturalize a particular political and social order. It thus examines how certain positions, knowledge and practices become normalized, how social and political consensus is produced, and how speeches of political actors are conductors in this process.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism : Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (New York, 2005) 16-8.

⁴⁸ Richard Jackson, ‘Constructing Enemies: ‘Islamic Discourse in Political and Academic Discourse’, *Governance and Opposition* 42:3 (2007) 397.

⁴⁹ Teun A. van Dijk, ‘Political Discourse and Ideology’, in: Clara Ubaldina Lorda and Montserrat Ribas (eds.), *Anàlisi del discurs politic* (Barcelona, 2002) 24-5.

⁵⁰ Jackson, ‘Constructing Enemies’, 395-7.

To make this last area of speech criticism more concrete, let us briefly look at the political discourse on 'Islamic terrorism' which is very relevant for our analysis of Netanyahu's speeches. The Islamic terrorism discourse already developed in the 1970s and 1980s but gained momentum only after the attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent war on terrorism. It became dominant through the political elites, academia and mass media that produced and reproduced many of the terms, assumptions, narratives and knowledge that together formed the current discourse. Jackson claims that the Islamic terrorism discourse is constructed of many contestable terms, labels and assumptions that are often vaguely defined, inaccurate or even misleading, lack explanatory power and can have counter-productive effects when applied in policy-making. Generalizing terms and labels as 'the Islamic world,' 'political Islam,' 'Islamism,' 'radicalism,' 'jihadists,' 'moderates,' and 'Islamic terrorism' are frequently used in the public discourse, while it often remains unclear what they exactly mean or refer to. The discourse is based on the problematic underlying assumptions that Islam is inherently violent, that terrorism is directly linked to religious fundamentalism, and that Islamic terrorism poses a massive threat to the Western societies. First, this implies that the roots and causes of this so-called form of 'religious terrorism' need to be found in the Islamic doctrines and practices, while it obscures the more important political motivations of militant groups. Second, the discourse assumes that all Islamic fundamentalist groups are (potentially) involved in terrorism and ideologically opposed to the West, while it ignores the large variety among Islamist and Islamic fundamentalist groups, that are not necessarily violent, nationalist, politically active or opposed to democracy. Those groups that are involved in terrorism, however, are deprived of any rationality and described only in terms of deep hatred, fanaticism and extremism, so that negotiation or dialogue with them is considered to be impossible. The political functions of this particular discourse, wherein enemies and future threats are effectively constructed, are that politicians propagate fear of terrorism *inter alia* to construct and maintain national identity, to keep attention away from other complex issues, to expand the regional power of particular states, or to shape the ideational conditions for political and military action against terrorism. This already contributed to negative ideological effects of rising tensions with Muslim communities in Western countries, greater resentment against Islam, and the erosion of ethical standards in counter-terror measures.⁵¹

⁵¹ Ibidem, 394-426; Richard Jackson, 'Security, Democracy, and the Rhetoric of Counter-Terrorism', *Democracy and Security* 1:2 (2005) 156-60; Krista De Castella, Craig McGarty and Luke Musgrove, 'Fear Appeals in Political Rhetoric about Terrorism: An Analysis of Speeches by Australian Prime Minister Howard', *Political Psychology* 30:1 (2009) 1-4.

The Holocaust Imagery in Netanyahu's Speeches

Since his second term as the Israeli Prime Minister, Netanyahu almost never missed his chance to deliver speeches to warn the public for the Iranian nuclear threat. He got the reputation of being a brilliant orator, who knows how to sway the public and to use all rhetorical tools available to emphasize his message. While many political leaders rely on ghost writers for their speeches, Netanyahu writes his own speeches. He is a man of words who diligently and punctiliously drafts fluent speeches full of political statements, anecdotes and historical references. In his public performances he speaks with an authoritative and lecturing tone and pretends that he knows much more about Iran than his addressees.⁵² Although Netanyahu's speeches are certainly not appreciated by all of his recipients, this does not mean that his public diplomacy has not been effective. While there is a wide consensus that Netanyahu successfully put the Iranian threat on the political agenda in Israel, the United States and the UN, some even went so far as to claim that it were his very speeches that kept him into power.⁵³ Our primary concern here is to analyze Netanyahu's most controversial rhetorical strategy of using Holocaust analogies in his speeches on Iran's nuclear program. For this analysis I selected eight speeches that Netanyahu delivered between September 2009 and April 2015 to different audiences and which contained multiple references to the Holocaust. Four speeches were delivered at the UN General Assembly, two speeches at the Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony at Yad Vashem (Jerusalem), and the remaining two speeches were respectively presented at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) conference and in the American Congress. For each speech I analyze the use and function of Holocaust analogies and look at the specific context in which the speech was delivered.

The first speech that Netanyahu delivered to the UN General Assembly in his second term as Prime Minister was in New York on 24 September 2009. The speech was overshadowed by the anti-Semitic statements of Ahmadinejad, who less than a week before called the Holocaust a lie "that was based on an unprovable and mythical claim" to undermine Israel's right to exist.⁵⁴ Netanyahu condemned these statements in the beginning of his speech stating

⁵² Ben Caspit, 'Bibi's UN speech misses again', Al-Monitor, 30 September 2014: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/09/benjamin-netanyahu-un-general-assembly-speech-aipac.html#> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

⁵³ William Booth, 'Netanyahu's address to Congress will be most important of his life', *The Washington Post*, 28 February 2015: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/netanyahus-address-to-congress-will-be-most-important-speech-of-his-life/2015/02/28/679aa694-bd10-11e4-9dfb-03366e719af8_story.html (accessed on 20 June 2015).

⁵⁴ Parisa Hafezi and Firouz Sedarat, 'Ahmadinejad says Holocaust a lie, Israel has no future', Reuters, 18 September 2009: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/09/18/us-iran-idUSTRE58H17S20090918> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

that history taught that “what starts with attacks on the Jews eventually ends up engulfing many others.” This condemnation already implied the potential danger of Iran that was not different from the Nazi regime, that apart from the Jews persecuted many other groups during the Holocaust. He continued with his plea to the international community to take immediate action against the Iranian regime that was “fueled by an extreme fundamentalism” and sought to build nuclear weapons:

“[I]f the most primitive fanaticism can acquire the most deadly weapons, the march of history could be reversed for a time. And like the belated victory over the Nazis, the forces of progress and freedom will prevail only after an horrific toll of blood and fortune has been exacted from mankind. That is why the greatest threat facing the world today is the marriage between religious fanaticism and the weapons of mass destruction. (...) [O]nly if we roll back the forces of terror, led by Iran, that seek to destroy peace, eliminate Israel and overthrow the world order. The question facing the international community is whether it is prepared to confront those forces or accommodate them.”⁵⁵ (New York, 24 September 2009)

Netanyahu effectively combined in this speech the Holocaust and Islamic terrorism discourses to warn the international community for the global threat of Iran, that he accused of leading the “forces of terror” and striving for world domination. As he assigned the “most primitive fanaticism” to the Iranian leaders, the quasi-logical implication was that they were irrational and willing to use nuclear weapons, even if that would lead to their self-destruction. The analogy with the “belated victory over the Nazis” was deployed here as a historical reminder that taking action against Iran’s nuclear program was in everyone’s interest to prevent in fact another world war or nuclear Holocaust.

The second speech in our analysis was given at the Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony in Yad Vashem on 18 April 2012. It shows that Netanyahu applies the same rhetoric in his ‘domestic’ speeches for the Israeli public, that attended the ceremony or watched or read it on the national TV or the Internet. His most important message was that it was not only important for the Israeli Jews to remember the Holocaust but also to draw lessons from it. As he quoted Jabotinsky’s warning to the Polish Jews in 1938 for the catastrophe that was about to befall on them, Netanyahu claimed that he found himself in a similar kind of position to speak about such “uncomfortable truths.” The emphasis on speaking the ‘truth’ implied that the audience could not simply dismiss his warnings of the “existential threat” of Iran for being exaggerated as

⁵⁵ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Address by PM Netanyahu to the UN General Assembly’, 24 September 2009: http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/internationalorgs/speeches/pages/address_pm_netanyahu_un_general_assembly_24-sep-2009.aspx (accessed on 20 June 2015).

Jewish intellectuals mistakenly had done to Jabotinsky. Yet from this speech we also learn that some people in Israel already opposed Netanyahu's fear arousing language on Iran's nuclear program. In front of an audience that was presumably moved by the memory of the Holocaust, which forms the core of the Jewish-Israeli identity, Netanyahu appealed once again to their deepest fears. As he was aware of both the skepticism and psychological impact of his rhetoric, he claimed that as Prime Minister he had the right to invoke this memory to avert the future Iranian nuclear threat.

"Today, the regime in Iran openly calls and determinedly works for our destruction. And it is feverishly working to develop atomic weapons to achieve that goal. (...) I know that there are those who do not like when I speak such uncomfortable truths. They prefer that we not speak of a nuclear Iran as an existential threat. They say that such language, even if true, only sows fear and panic. (...) Those who dismiss Iran's threats as exaggerated or as mere idle posturing have learned nothing from the Holocaust. (...) Not only does the Prime Minister of Israel have the right, when speaking of these existential dangers, to invoke the memory of a third of our nation which was annihilated. It is his duty."⁵⁶ (Jerusalem, 18 April 2012)

"If the Western powers had drawn clear red lines during the 1930s, I believe they would have stopped Nazi aggression and World War II might have been avoided. (...) The red line should be drawn right here... Before Iran completes the second stage of nuclear enrichment necessary to make a bomb. Before Iran gets to a point where it's a few months away or a few weeks away from amassing enough enriched uranium to make a nuclear weapon."⁵⁷ (New York, 27 September 2012)

Nearly five months later Netanyahu delivered one of his most famous speeches for the UN General Assembly on 27 September 2012. For the first time he called on the international community to set a clear red line on Iran's nuclear enrichment program to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Again he referred to the Holocaust to claim that in the same vein the Western powers might have prevented the Second World War if they had drawn such red lines on Nazi-Germany in the 1930s. At the time the United States and the European states did not share Netanyahu's belief that Iran was capable of building nuclear weapons in the nearby future, as their intelligence agencies indicated that Iran's religious leadership did even not have made the political decision for that. In order to convince the world's state leaders, Netanyahu claimed by showing a simple cartoon bomb diagram depicting the several stages needed for the

⁵⁶ 'Text of Netanyahu's Holocaust Remembrance Day speech', *The Times of Israel*, 18 April 2012: <http://www.timesofisrael.com/text-of-netanyahus-holocaust-remembrance-day-speech/#ixzz3P5VkspxC> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

⁵⁷ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Address by PM Netanyahu to the UN General Assembly', 27 September 2012: <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2012/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-addresses-UN-27-Sep-2012.aspx> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

construction of a nuclear bomb that Iran was much closer than was previously thought. He estimated that “by next spring, at most by next summer” Iran would have reached the final stage where it would have enough enriched uranium to produce weapons-grade uranium, which would only take a few months or weeks, so that the time had come to take action. Western diplomats and nuclear experts rejected however his urgent call since Iran’s stockpile of enriched uranium was monitored by the IAEA.⁵⁸ Moreover, *The Guardian* revealed in February 2015 that leaked cables from the Mossad – which were shared with the South African intelligence a few weeks after the speech – contradicted Netanyahu’s estimation and concluded instead that while Iran “is not performing the activity necessary to produce weapons, it is working to close gaps in areas that appear legitimate such as enrichment, reactors, which will reduce the time required to produce weapons from the time the instruction is actually given.” The British newspaper concluded that Netanyahu had lied to the entire world in order to win support for a military strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities.⁵⁹ As Netanyahu’s time frame was indeed at odds with the information from the Mossad report, it remains questionable if he really intended to mislead the public or that his concern on Iran’s enrichment program just went further than that of the Israeli intelligence agency.

“The last century has taught us that when a radical regime with global ambitions gets awesome power, sooner or later, its appetite for aggression knows no bounds. That’s the central lesson of the 20th century. Now, we cannot forget it. The world may have forgotten this lesson. The Jewish people have not. (..) Israel will never acquiesce to nuclear arms in the hands of a rogue regime that repeatedly promises to wipe us off the map. Against such a threat, Israel will have no choice but to defend itself. I want there to be no confusion on this point: Israel will not allow Iran to get nuclear weapons. If Israel is forced to stand alone, Israel will stand alone. Yet in standing alone, Israel will know that we will be defending many, many others.”⁶⁰ (New York, 1 October 2013)

The election of Rouhani as Iranian President in June 2013 did not really lower Netanyahu’s inflammatory rhetoric on Iran’s nuclear program in his speech for the UN General Assembly on 1 October 2013. Despite Rouhani’s charm offensive to the Western world, Netanyahu

⁵⁸ Julian Borger, ‘Binyamin Netanyahu demands ‘red line’ to stop Iran nuclear programme’, *The Guardian*, 28 September 2012: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/27/binyamin-netanyahu-iran-nuclear-programme> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

⁵⁹ Seumas Milne, Ewen MacAskill and Clayton Swisher, ‘Leaked cables show Netanyahu’s Iran bomb claim contradicted by Mossad’, *The Guardian*, 23 February 2015 (including the Mossad report): <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/23/leaked-spy-cables-netanyahu-iran-bomb-mossad> <http://static.guim.co.uk/ni/1424713149380/Mossad-On-Iran-Nuclear-Stat.pdf> (both accessed on 20 June 2015).

⁶⁰ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Address by PM Netanyahu to the UN General Assembly’, 1 October 2013: <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2013/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-addresses-UN-General-Assembly-1-Oct-2013.aspx> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

distrusted him as much as his predecessor Ahmadinejad. As Rouhani was the former nuclear chief negotiator between 2003 and 2005, who in fact contributed to several nuclear deals in that period (including the 2004 Paris Agreement)⁶¹, Netanyahu accused him nonetheless of having advanced the nuclear program “behind a smokescreen of diplomatic engagement.”⁶² He spoke again about a “radical” and “rogue regime” that had practically remained unchanged but still pursued “global ambitions.” Nuclear weapons in the hands of such a regime would therefore be extremely dangerous, especially for Israel taking Ahmadinejad’s former statements into account. The central lesson of the twentieth century, when the European Jews could not defend themselves against the Nazis, thus legitimized Israel to take military action. Here the Holocaust discourse is applied in two different ways: first, the Iranian regime seeking nuclear weapons is put into the same category as the Nazis; and second, the Holocaust is used as analogy to convince the audience that intervention against this similar threat, that was not only directed against Israel, was absolutely necessary.

“Militant Islam’s ambition to dominate the world seems mad. But so too did the global ambitions of another fanatic ideology that swept to power eight decades ago. The Nazis believed in a master race. The militant Islamists believe in a master faith. They just disagree about who among them will be the master... of the master faith. That’s what they truly disagree about. Therefore, the question before us is whether militant Islam will have the power to realize its unbridled ambitions. There is one place where that could soon happen: The Islamic State of Iran.”⁶³ (New York, 29 September 2014)

On 29 September 2014, a month after the third Gaza War in six years had come to an end, Netanyahu devoted part of his address to the UN General Assembly to Israel’s war against Hamas and the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to counter the harsh criticism that Israel had received from the international community. He put Hamas and ISIS on the same footage as “branches of the same poisonous tree,” that shared the same “fanatic ideology” for world domination. By using both organizations as examples of the spread of militant Islam, he sophisticatedly made an instrumental connection with the main topic of his speech: the Iranian nuclear threat. Netanyahu persuaded his audience to regard the global ambition of militant Islamists, who claimed they had the “master faith,” of being not different from that of the Nazis, who believed in the “master race.” This implied they had merely the same potential, although he admitted that militant Islamic organizations did not form a unified body. Less convincingly,

⁶¹ Patrikarakos, *Nuclear Iran*, 195-210.

⁶² See footnote 60.

⁶³ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Address by PM Netanyahu to the UN General Assembly’, 29 September 2014: <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2014/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-addresses-the-UN-General-Assembly-29-Sep-2014.aspx> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

he then argued that Iran could realize those ambitions through its global terror campaign and nuclear weapon program. He asked his audience if they would allow ISIS to enrich uranium or to develop intercontinental ballistic missiles in order to get Iran recognized as an even greater threat than ISIS.⁶⁴ As he not only compared Iran to the Nazis but also to ISIS, that was already fought by an international coalition, it seems that he looked for new ways to let the international community help to stop Iran's nuclear program. It might be true that the Holocaust discourse had already lost some of its impact, after it was used over so many times by Netanyahu.

“[T]his same Iran vows to annihilate Israel. If it develops nuclear weapons, it would have the means to achieve that goal. We must not let that happen. And as Prime Minister of Israel, I have a moral obligation to speak up in the face of these dangers while there's still time to avert them. For two thousand years, my people, the Jewish people, were stateless, defenseless, voiceless. We were utterly powerless against our enemies who swore to destroy us. We suffered relentless persecution and horrific attacks. We could never speak on our own behalf, and we could not defend ourselves. (..) The days when the Jewish people are passive in the face of threats to annihilate us, those days are over. Today in our sovereign state of Israel, we defend ourselves. And being able to defend ourselves, we ally with others, most importantly, the United States of America, to defend our common civilization against common threats.”⁶⁵ (Washington, 2 March 2015)

“For those who believe that Iran threatens the Jewish state, but not the Jewish people, listen to Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, Iran's chief terrorist proxy. He said: If all the Jews gather in Israel, it will save us the trouble of chasing them down around the world. But Iran's regime is not merely a Jewish problem, any more than the Nazi regime was merely a Jewish problem. The six million Jews murdered by the Nazis were but a fraction of the sixty million people killed in World War II. So, too, Iran's regime poses a grave threat, not only to Israel, but also to the peace of the entire world. To understand just how dangerous Iran would be with nuclear weapons, we must fully understand the nature of the regime.”⁶⁶ (Washington, 3 March 2015)

“Just as the Nazis aspired to crush civilization and to establish a ‘master race’ to replace it in controlling the world while annihilating the Jewish people, so too does Iran strive to gain control over the region, from which it would spread further, with the explicit intent of obliterating the Jewish state. Iran is advancing in two directions: the first is developing the ability to arm itself with nuclear weapons and accumulate a stockpile of ballistic missiles; and the second - exporting the Khomeinist revolution to many

⁶⁴ Idem.

⁶⁵ ‘Full text of PM Netanyahu's speech to AIPAC’, *The Jerusalem Post*, 2 March 2015: <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Full-text-of-PM-Netanyahus-speech-to-AIPAC-392701> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

⁶⁶ ‘The complete transcript of Netanyahu's address to Congress’, *The Washington Post*, 3 March 2015: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2015/03/03/full-text-netanyahus-address-to-congress/> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

countries by heavily using terrorism and taking over large parts of the Middle East. Everything is out in the open - it is all taking place in broad daylight, in front of cameras. And yet, the blindness is immense.”⁶⁷
(Jerusalem, 15 April 2015)

Netanyahu’s most recent speeches on Iran’s nuclear program in March and April 2015 did not see any major changes in his persuasive strategies. Against the backdrop of the nascent nuclear agreement between the six world powers (P5+1) and Iran, that Netanyahu strongly opposes, he used the same kind of rhetoric against Iran. Both speeches he held in Washington in early March for the American pro-Israel lobby organization AIPAC and the Congress were expected by Israeli and international media to damage the relations between Israel and the United States. Netanyahu criticized the American policy in the nuclear negotiations during this time for doing nothing to change the Iranian regime nor to demand the recognition of Israel.⁶⁸ In his speech at the annual AIPAC conference, Netanyahu emphasized however the common threats that both states were facing. Together with the United States, Israel’s most important ally, Israel would actively defend the Jewish people, that previously had been passive in the Holocaust, against Iran. More outspoken was Netanyahu in his speech to the Congress, that he criticized for leaving the Iran’s nuclear infrastructure largely intact if it would approve the nuclear deal. This meant that the United States would not really prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, as inspectors could only report but not stop violations of the agreement.⁶⁹ He also appealed to the Holocaust memory by claiming that it was in everyone’s interest to contain Iran’s global threat, as the Nazis murdered many more millions of people during the Second World War besides the six million Jews. While his Congress speech was intended to avert the nuclear agreement or at least to change its conditions, some commentator suggested that it was primarily meant to influence Israeli voters for the upcoming elections of mid-March 2015, as the meeting was scheduled in the morning which enabled the Israeli TV to broadcast the speech at prime time.⁷⁰

This dual political agenda of Netanyahu, as I would call it, was again vividly exposed in his speech at the Yad Vashem ceremony on 15 April 2015. As he presented himself as the

⁶⁷ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘PM Netanyahu: Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day’, 15 April 2015: <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/History/Holocaust/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-Holocaust-Remembrance-Day-15-Apr-2015.aspx> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

⁶⁸ Kendall Breitman, ‘Barack Obama rejects Benjamin Netanyahu’s call for Iran to recognize Israel’, *Politico*, 6 April 2015: <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/04/barack-obama-rejects-benjamin-netanyahus-call-for-iran-to-recognize-israel-116710.html> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

⁶⁹ See footnote 66.

⁷⁰ Lori Lowenthal Marcus, ‘Netanyahu’s Speech to Congress – Blocked from U.S. Prime Time, Perfect for Israel’, *The Jewish Press*, 1 March 2015: <http://www.jewishpress.com/news/breaking-news/netanyahus-speech-to-congress-blocked-from-u-s-prime-time-perfect-for-israel/2015/03/01/> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

political leader who would protect the Jewish state at all costs, his speech was due to the special occasion even more framed in the Holocaust discourse to warn the Israeli public for the Iranian threat and the great risk of the framework nuclear agreement. He first compared Iran's regional aspirations in the Middle East and intent to destroy Israel to the Nazi campaign to conquer Europe during the Second World War and to murder all the Jews. He then asserted that the world powers led by the United States were making a "grave mistake" in their negotiations with Iran and had learned nothing from the Holocaust. They capitulated "in the face of Iran's aggressive actions" by not demanding the full dismantlement of its nuclear program like the democratic states had failed to stop the rise of Nazism. He charged them for being "comatose" and "delusional" in the face of the today's Nazis, terms that were actually censored or translated differently from the official transcript provided by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁷¹ While Netanyahu obviously tends to maintain in power in Israel with using such fear arousing rhetoric, in which he actually succeeded with his reelection, there is a growing criticism in Israel on his recurring references to the Holocaust. On behalf of the Yad Vashem Council, Chairman Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau declared in February 2015 that the cynical use of the Holocaust for political objectives was unacceptable and that the Holocaust memory should bind the Israeli society instead of drifting it apart. Yet it is very unlikely that the Holocaust will be banned from the political discourse or at least from the election campaigns in Israel. Not only Netanyahu but many other former political leaders on both the right and left of the political spectrum drew on the Holocaust for their manipulative tactics ever since the State of Israel was established. It has simply become impossible to exclude the Holocaust discourse from politics. Historian Tom Segev argued that the difficult differentiation between sincere Holocaust sentiment and manipulative Holocaust arguments reflects the fundamental disagreement in the Israeli society about the lessons of the Holocaust and if these still apply to the current political environment.⁷² For Netanyahu these lessons certainly apply to Israel's position in the Middle East, but with his exclusive focus on Iran's nuclear program in his domestic and international speeches he also fails to deal with perhaps even more important issues in the socio-economic sphere and in finding long-term solutions for the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As only fractions of his speeches for the UN General Assembly are devoted to the Palestinian question, which is beyond

⁷¹ 'Netanyahu says West is 'comatose, delusional' in face of today's Nazis', *The Times of Israel*, 15 April 2015: <http://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-iran-deal-proves-world-has-not-learned-lessons-of-holocaust/> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

⁷² Yuval Avivi, 'Holocaust's use as political tool divides Israelis', *Al-Monitor*, 13 May 2015: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/israel-holocaust-discourse-populism-political-propaganda.html> (accessed on 20 June 2015).

the topic of this essay, it does not appear that Netanyahu makes much effort to accomplish peace or to change the current status-quo.

Conclusion

The analysis of Netanyahu's speeches on Iran's nuclear program has shown that the Holocaust discourse is applied in many different ways to persuade or manipulate his audience to advance his own political agenda and to strengthen his position in the Likud and as Prime Minister of Israel. His speeches focus, with a few exceptions, almost exclusively on Iran at occasions that are meant to address other issues as well. This has contributed to the idea that he diverts attention from certain issues, most notably the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, he is less capable or willing to deal with. As a political leader who is also a recognized expert in terrorism, it is not surprising that he pursues a security agenda he knows more about than most people around him. He even went further in his predictions when Iran was able to produce nuclear weapons than his own intelligence agency. In his speeches he stated many times that he understands the lessons of the Holocaust and the nature of the Iranian regime better than his recipients. The Iranian leadership that indeed provides support for terrorist organizations that fight against Israel is repeatedly depicted as dangerous as the Nazi regime with the same global ambitions, although these rhetorical analogies do not actually prove his statements. His Revisionist-Zionist ideology also explains his deep mistrust and concern about the Iranian leaders, because of the dominant ideological ideas and concepts of the permanent Arab-Muslim hostility and opposition against Israel, the growth of anti-Western Islamic terrorism, and the widespread anti-Semitism in the Middle East. This all indicates that Netanyahu uses every tool available to him at every occasion, even at the annual Holocaust memorial ceremony at Yad Vashem, to let the Israeli public and international community believe that Iran pursues nuclear weapons, that a nuclear Iran is a global threat and that its nuclear program therefore needs to be fully dismantled. He already succeeded to put the Iranian nuclear threat on top of the Israeli security agenda and to increase international pressure on Iran, despite his most recent opposition against the framework nuclear agreement. The great irony is that his manipulative use of the Holocaust has been largely effective, although Yad Vashem and some segments in the Israeli society would rather see the Holocaust to be banned from the political discourse. This seems however to be simply impossible as the Holocaust memory is at the very core of the Jewish-Israeli identity.

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