

International Conference on Media and Communication

Information, Media and Truth in the Post-Truth and Artificial  
Intelligence Era

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Keynote Speakers:

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## INFORMATION, MEDIA AND TRUTH IN THE POST-TRUTH AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ERA

### **Advertorial**

Today's audience has not only migrated online, but has settled into the society of platforms (van Dijck et al., 2018). Politics, marketing, journalism, public relations, also extremists and terrorists, are located there. Much has changed for human life, compared to decades ago. Communications between people have changed, as well as government communications with the public (Strömbäck, 2008).

These changes give the citizen the convenience to engage with political actors and the media, but there are also politicians who compete online for their attention and credibility (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021). There are also practitioners of public relations with their strategic messages, there is also religion and clergy, there are individuals who daily curate the personal branding. They are there for publicity, to have their voice heard, sometimes loud, sometimes positive and sometimes negative. There is medicine, science, music, identity, health, war, performance, intimate relationships, consumption, memory, and much more (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014). What is special is that everyone has the opportunity to address everyone in an audience of millions and billions.

However, in this situation of mediatization of everything (Hepp, 2013; Hjarvard, 2013), even rational claims based on facts fall, while lies or even the truth can reach a previously unimaginable publics (Waisbord, 2018). Journalists have lost the monopoly of information, while politics due to social media and alternative media (Strömbäck, 2023; Waisbord, 2022), does not tire too much for the media. The main responsibility of the media to "distribute true information to keep the public informed" (Tandoc et al., 2022, p. 2), today increasingly goes to the distribution of information and products that are acceptable to the public, often in damage to the quality of information (Martin, 2021). Truth has been replaced by beliefs (Boorstin, 1961, 2012), while populist post-truth rhetoric has affected the elite, which frustrates them and undermines democracy (Waisbord, 2018). Experts and elites are increasingly reluctant to engage actively and publicly to oppose demagogic populists, where we have a "hyperpartisan content" online (Ferrara et al. 2020) which has brought mob censorship (Waisbord, 2023) and where the defendant speaks in equal positions with a Nobel laureate (Eco, 2015). Demagogic populists on the one hand and elite experts on the other, believe that reality is different from what the majority of the population believes (Fuller, 2018), while in Facebook democracy (Marichal, 2012) the concern of the architecture of democracy itself increases, which some also call post-truth democracy (Chambers, 2021). People in this democracy respond more to feelings and beliefs than to facts and arguments (d'Ancona, 2017).

On the other side, artificial intelligence (AI) still has problems with feelings. AI, as a benefit and a challenge at the same time, is already being used in the media, public relations and political communication. Many studies call for greater attention to the social, cultural and ethical dynamics of AI (Logan & Waymer, 2024), because it can be used to highlight and understand inequalities that exist in social and workplace environments (Chauhan & Kshetri, 2022).

Meanwhile, in this environment where about 5 billion people are online with their hyperhistories (Floridi, 2014), the battle is for attention and not media space, because the media enabled Zelensky to be at the same time physically at the front of the war, and to enter the assemblies of western democracies, seeking the protection of universal values (Saliu, 2023). The pain, meanwhile, where war kills children, prompts student protests in Europe and the US because social media has already made glocalism.

Therefore, the purpose of this conference is to bring together professionals in the field of journalism, public relations, political science, marketing, religious communication etc., to elaborate these transformations today, by sending an abstract of 150-200 words related to the phenomena described as well as to the following topics, but not only:

- Today's online censorship (Mob censorship)
- The democracy of social media
- Mediatization of everyday life
- Political Marketing in the Networking Age
- Public relations in the digital age
- Media education: media consumption and diet
- Online public space, infosphere
- Propaganda and fake news (in times of peace or even war)
- Media and truth in the age of fake news
- Populism in the age of social media
- TV as a narcissistic mirror of politicians
- Social media as virtual public space and personal branding
- Viewing from the public: when the public wants banality
- TikTok and Memes
- Hate speech online
- When televisions hide by showing
- Soft power, international public relations and public diplomacy in the digital age
- Digital diplomacy and the international image of the country
- Fact-checking in the age of social media
- Media exposure as a political PR opportunity in times of crisis
- Ethics and Privacy in the Age of Social Media
- Audience journalism vs quality journalism
- Media sensation in the age of fake news
- Online bullying

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Prof. Dr. Mark Deuze, University of Amsterdam  
*Living a Good Life in Media*

Prof. Dr. Łukasz Tomczyk, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland  
*Creating false information online about teachers and the digital security of the school ecosystem*

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# Argumentation Strategies and Linguistic Means for Contextualizing the Necessity for Military Action in Gaza: Analyzing Israeli Authorities' Discourse

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## Abstract

The tragic events of October 7th, 2023, have resulted in the deadliest iteration of the conflict between Israel and Gaza to date. Israel's response to this attack has drawn ire from the international community due to the scale of its military actions. This paper seeks to answer how Israeli politicians contextualize the necessity of their military actions to an international, predominantly Western audience. The corpus collected and analyzed for this study consists of press releases, statements, interviews, and Q&A sessions by PM Benjamin Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog, IDF Spokesperson Daniel Hagari, and UN envoy Gilad Erdan. Using Fairclough's framework of critical discourse analysis (1989, 1995), the research focused, first, on identifying the argumentation strategies Israeli politicians use, and second, on analyzing the linguistic means they employ to strengthen their arguments. A qualitative descriptive approach is adopted in analyzing the corpus. The insights gained from this study reveal that the argumentation strategies of Israeli officials rest mainly on establishing a common identity with the audience, legitimizing their position while delegitimizing the Palestinian side, and using loss and gain framing to support their arguments. Moreover, the analysis points to a heavy reliance on metaphors, analogies, and juxtapositions, as well as repetitions, interpersonal markers, and positively and negatively connoted words and collocations, as linguistic means purposefully used to strengthen their arguments and reinforce the existing power structures based on ideological pretenses.

**Keywords:** political discourse, press releases, language strategies, military conflict

## 1. Introduction

The scope of political acts consists of many communicative activities. These activities are of persuasive nature and require rhetorical and persuasive skills (Wodak, 2015). Politicians use these skills in their argumentation in order to win over the listener or audience to their side. This is particularly important in times of political, economic and military crisis when the stakes are high and political figures put their rhetorical skills to use in order to persuade people to their cause.

One such context in which politicians' discourse plays a major role is currently unfolding in the recently resurged Israeli-Palestinian military and political conflict. The storming of Palestinian militant groups into Israel proper on October 7th, 2023 has left 1,143 people dead and thousands more injured. Israel's response to this attack has made this the deadliest iteration of the Israel-Gaza conflict to date. At the moment of writing, more than 38,000 Palestinians have been confirmed killed by Israel's military actions taken in the Gaza Strip, thousands injured, displaced, and thousands more missing under the rubble. Besides the devastating human toll, the

structural destruction of homes and civilian infrastructure has reached a severe magnitude. A United Nations report has estimated that over 50% (ESCWA 2024) of all structures in the Gaza Strip have been damaged or destroyed, and over 2 million people have been displaced.

Israel's response to the October 7th attack and its subsequent military actions in the Gaza Strip has drawn the ire of the general public in the world. Since the 7th of October, Israeli officials have been using their rhetorical skills in press releases, televised statements, and interviews in order to justify the military actions that Israel would take and has taken thus far.

This paper looks at statements made by high-ranking Israeli politicians following the attack, intended to contextualize the necessity for military actions in the Gaza Strip. Through the frame of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1989, 1995), the paper examines and explains the argumentation strategies (Wodak 2015) and language means employed in these statements, which are made in English as they are intended primarily for an international audience.

More specifically, as to the argumentation strategies, this paper looks at how Israeli authorities: establish common identity with the audience they address (Horvath, 2009)<sup>1</sup>; reinforce power relations through the use of (de)legitimizing strategies (Reyes, 2011)<sup>2</sup>; and use loss and gain framing in their arguments in order to bring to the forefront the negative consequences and the benefits of not taking and of taking action, respectively (Borah, 2022).

Regarding the actual linguistic means used to uphold the Israeli authorities' argumentation, this study puts the focus on: positively and negatively connoted vocabulary and collocations (Neshkovska, 2019); interpersonal markers (Hyland, 2005)<sup>3</sup>; figures of speech (Charteris-Black 2011)<sup>4</sup>, and debasement language (Cervone et al., 2021)<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. Literature review

The literature review shows that this topic has not been discussed very avidly so far, at least not from the perspective laid out in this study. In this section, we will discuss some related works on the topic of the Israel-Palestine issue and where this study lands among them.

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<sup>1</sup> Horvath (2009) argues that in times of political crisis, politicians use terms of unity like "support", "friends", "allies", in order to galvanize the audience to their side.

<sup>2</sup> Reyes (2011) defines legitimization as a speech act that justifies the actions and behavior of the speaker with the goal of seeking approval from the listener, and delegitimization as the alternative positions which are applied to the speaker's interlocutor through negative connotations.

<sup>3</sup> Hyland (2005) defines interpersonal markers as self-mentions (first person pronouns and possessive adjectives) and engagement markers (you, your, inclusive "we") to maintain and establish rapport with the audience which builds the common identity argumentation and conditions the listeners to accept the speaker's position as their own.

<sup>4</sup> According to Charteris-Black (2011) metaphors, rhetorical questions, analogies, hypophora, repetitions, juxtapositions etc. are language tools used to reel in the listener with familiar concepts, grab their attention, and persuade them into accepting the side of the speaker as the correct side. All of these tactics are used in a subtle way, especially when they are familiar to the listener, which makes for an effective way to persuade the listener without them realizing that they are being persuaded.

<sup>5</sup> Debasement language is used as an umbrella term that includes the use of derogatory and offensive terms, obscenities, and hate speech, which are deployed with the set goal of reducing the subject's (whether it be a person or group) reputation and value (Cervone et al., 2021)

Regarding the historical background of the conflict, Samuel (2023) offers a discussion on the nature of the October 7th attack, which stands in stark contrast to how many journalists and even politicians depict it. The current prevailing narrative that the Hamas attack was driven by hatred of Jews, Samuel (2023) argues, is inaccurate, due to the “century-old legal history of Palestinian dispossession” through Israel’s blockade on the Gaza Strip, illegal settlement expansions in the West Bank and the disillusionment of Palestinians in the International legal system after decades of denying them their right to self-determination.

Probably the closest study in relation to this study is done by Dr. Aamer Almustafa (2024) who studied the use of language in the news coverage of 10 international media outlets of the current Israel-Gaza war. The findings of his research show the bias in the media’s coverage of the current war in Gaza created by the almost systemic “negative-other representation” of any anti-Israel sentiment and the “positive-self representation” of the Israeli position. These ideological differences, Almustafa (2024) argues, are reinforced in the media’s coverage through “manipulation practices on the discursive and linguistic levels, influencing people’s minds, increasing their polarity, and altering the Gaza war’s conception.” An earlier study conducted on the media’s biases in their reporting on the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict by Farrah (2018) purports a similar explanation – “the language in the newspapers is used to form ideas and beliefs. The discourse features played an influential role in the construction of ideas. Linguistic resources and rhetorical devices are manipulated to serve a range of functions, for example to enhance a belief, to justify a position and to counter an argument.”

A study regarding the translations of political speeches in Arab-Israeli conflicts (with a focus on the Gaza War in 2008/9 as well as the Lebanon War in 2006) by Omar (2020) put forth the contention that even translators working for English-speaking international media outlets, “as a reader of the source text and an author of the target text”, leave their mark on the translated speech by choosing language appropriate to their ideological beliefs.

Another study, which does not refer to the military conflict discussed here, but which is closely related to this topic, is Sarfo and Krampa’s (2013) analysis on Bush and Obama’s speeches on terrorism. The major findings in their study show that both Bush and Obama use “emotionally charged vocabulary and expressions” to denote the actions of terrorists like “killing” and “massacring”, while, at the same time, they deliver the anti-terrorist stance through more ambiguous terms like “eliminating” and “neutralizing”.

On the basis of this brief literature overview, it is evident that in the hands of politicians, journalists, and even translators, who render political and media discourse on wars and military conflicts from one language into another, language plays a major role in contextualizing military conflicts, creating biases and shaping public opinion.

### **3. Research methodology**

The overarching aim of the research is to provide an answer to the research question: “How do Israeli officials use language to craft convincing argumentation that contextualizes the necessity for the military actions in Gaza, which has brought about an unprecedented amount of death and destruction?”



For the purposes of this study a corpus was compiled, which consists of 10 televised statements, press releases, interviews, and Q&A sessions by Israeli officials (see Appendix). The material is in English as the addresses are all intended for a western, or more broadly speaking, an international audience. Israeli authorities whose discourse is scrutinized in this research are: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog, Israeli Defence Force (IDF) spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, and the now former Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Gilad Erdan. These political figures were chosen for this research due to the fact that they are the most prominent, high-ranking officials that have been delivering organized, pre-written, or simply prepared speeches on the matter of Israel's military actions in the Gaza Strip since October 7th, 2023.

The collected data set amounts to over 100 minutes of footage collected in the immediate aftermath of October the 7th and throughout the rest of the month of October in 2023. The footage is primarily sourced through the official Israeli government YouTube channels such as IsraeliPM, which belongs to the Prime Minister of Israel, and the Israel Defense Forces channel, which is focused on disseminating information from the perspective of the army. News channels such as the Israeli-based i24NEWS English, which is an Israeli news channel that offers international coverage in English, were also used in gathering the material for this research. In addition, other western news channels, such as the BBC, MSNBC, and CBS were used as well. Lastly, additional material was gathered through pro-Israeli channels by organizations that are affiliated or have a vested interest in spreading the Israeli perspective, such as AIJAC.

Having compiled the corpus of speeches and statements, the first step of our analysis was to detect the main argumentation strategies in the discourse of the aforementioned politicians which encompass: establishing common identity with the audience; legitimization vs. delegitimization strategies, and the loss and gain framing of arguments. The second step was directed at identifying the linguistic means that the politicians employ for the purpose of reinforcing their line of argumentation and, consequently, the effect of persuasion too. Mainly, the analysis was focused on the use of positively vs. negatively connoted words and collocations, interpersonal and engagement markers; figures of speech, and instances of debasement language. The research relies on descriptive analysis which is qualitative in nature (Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas, 2013).

#### **4. Results**

In the following sections, the research displays excerpts of the analyzed press releases, statements, and interviews, and describes the argumentation strategies used within the excerpts, alongside the linguistic means employed to enhance their persuasive effect. The results showed that the argumentation strategies were completely aligned across all of the examinees; or, in other words, there were no discrepancies or incongruences in the rhetoric, i.e. argumentation of all Israeli authorities analyzed in this study.

##### ***4.1 Establishing common identity with the audience***

The thorough analysis of the corpus revealed that one of the most common strategies of the Israeli authorities was to establish a common identity with the audience that they are addressing. This, logically, was with the purpose to attain the consent of western and international audiences for the military actions to come, or currently ongoing. This strategy reels in the audience and asks them to assume the Israeli position in the aftermath of the October 7th attack.

(1) Benjamin Netanyahu, October 9th, IsraeliPM: *"...They are savages. Hamas is ISIS. And just as the forces of civilization defeated ISIS, the forces of civilization must support Israel in defeating Hamas. I want to thank President Biden for his unequivocal support. I want to thank leaders across the world for standing with Israel today. I want to thank the people and Congress of the United States of America. In fighting Hamas, Israel is not only fighting for its own people, it is fighting for every country that stands against barbarism. Israel will win this war, and when Israel wins, the entire Civilized World wins."*

In example (1) Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu delivers his first address in English regarding the latest Israel-Gaza conflict. Here metaphors and juxtapositions are used to denote Israel as a "force of civilization" which is in juxtaposition to Hamas's "force of barbarism". He uses the debasement term "savages" to degrade and otherize the Palestinians as it strengthens the juxtaposition. The metaphors of civilization vs. barbarism is an easy way of controlling the narrative of which side of the conflict is good, and which one is bad. He is also drawing an analogy between the defeat of ISIS, against which western nations took part in military actions in the war in Syria, to the proposed defeat of Hamas, to further strengthen the common identity with the audience in the fight against Hamas. He uses interpersonal markers to engage the audience in the fight against Hamas by using the first person pronoun "I" to position himself at the center of Israel's operation and the implied "we" for the audience, through the previously established metaphor of the "civilized world" or "forces of civilization". This raises the stakes for the audience as now they have a vested interest in the Israeli side winning in the conflict as they are representing the civilized world against the forces of barbarism. At a later date, on October 18th, Netanyahu even explicitly says:

(2) Benjamin Netanyahu, October 18th, IsraeliPM: *"The forces of civilization will prevail. For our sake, for your sake. For peace and security in our region and in the world."*

Benjamin Netanyahu here (2) uses interpersonal markers to argue that not only does Israel fight for itself, it also fights for the rest of the world because Hamas, and their "genocidal ideology" pose an existential threat to the entire world. The phrase "for your sake" engages the audience by elevating the risk of not siding with Israel in this conflict.

(3) Benjamin Netanyahu, October 10th, IsraeliPM: *"...Mr. President, Joe, I want to thank you for your continued and unequivocal support and the work of the entire administration to support us. The Israeli people were deeply moved by the emotion that Adm. Kirby showed in his interview yesterday. It was deeply*

*moving. And it represented the depth of the commitment you have, the administration has, and the American people across the board have for Israel."*

This excerpt (3) is from a filmed phone call between PM Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Joe Biden. The support of the US for the Israeli government is reiterated through many of the speeches, whether it be at the front or the tail-end of the speech (sometimes both). In this instance, Netanyahu builds common identity by expressing that not only is Israel backed by the United States government, but by the American people as well, which establishes this as the correct position to take. He uses interpersonal markers "I" and "you" for (both the American people and government) to signify the relationship between him and the audience.

(4) Daniel Hagari, October 18th, i24NEWS, BBC: *"We must stay moral, we must play according the International law. We have no other way, otherwise we won't be a democrat liberal country...We will not be terrorized. We have our values, we know what we're fighting for. We know what we're fighting for. We're fighting for our country. We are fighting to be with our values. A moral country, that is a Democrat Liberal Jewish country."*

Here we can see Daniel Hagari (4) drawing proximity to western audiences, who are predominantly citizens of such "democratic" and "liberal" countries by hammering on the point that Israel is a similar country. Words with positive connotations such as "value", "moral", "liberal" are used to establish common identity with the audience and assure them that Israeli military action is done according to International law. The repetitive use of the interpersonal marker "we" is used at the start of almost every sentence to solidify the legitimacy of the Israeli position in this struggle. The repetition of "fighting" for the previously established "democratic liberal values" also strengthens the validity of Israel's actions.

(5) Gilad Erdan, October 27th, AIJAC: *"What you see here are not pictures from Auschwitz, but Israelis raped, butchered, and burned alive. This is not Auschwitz. This is Hamas... Over 1400 have been slaughtered, thousands injured, and over 220 hostages are being held right now by Hamas ISIS terrorists. To say that this is Israel's 9/11 would be an understatement. Proportionally, the death toll of this atrocity is 15 times bigger than 9/11."*

In this example (5), Gilad Erdan tackles both analogies of tragedies that have affected the lives of people from western countries, the Holocaust and 9/11. He compares the images of the dead from the October 7 attack with the images of the dead in Auschwitz. He then compares the October 7th casualty number to the casualty number of 9/11, while amplifying the effect by adjusting the casualty number per capita, concluding that the October 7th attack was 15 times bigger than even 9/11. Gilad Erdan builds the common identity between Israel and the audience through the shared trauma of these comparable experiences.

(6) Benjamin Netanyahu, October 18th, IsraeliPM: *"On October 7, Hamas murdered 1400 Israelis, maybe more. This is in a country of fewer than 10 million people. This would be equivalent to over 50 thousand Americans murdered in a single day. That's 20 - 9/11s."*

In (6), Netanyahu draws a similar analogy between Israel and the USA by equating the October 7 attack with twenty 9/11 attacks. This analogy is an effective way to amplify the devastation of the attack and contextualize its severity to an audience that has been impacted by a similar attack. He calls back to a traumatizing event in the history of the American people and adjusts the numbers per capita to reflect an even worse severity of the October 7 attack in order to earn the sympathies of the audience.

(7) Gilad Erdan, October 27th, AIJAC: *“They will not stop until they murder all “infidels”, as they call us.”*

In example (7), Gilat Erdan’s use of 'us' is intended to represent the entirety of the 'Western world,' as he argues that Hamas’s ideology conflicts not only with Israel’s values but also with those of the Western world. He uses the term “infidels” which has a negative connotation, denoting people who are non-believers in a certain religion (in this case western countries whose major religion is not Islam). In this case, the word “infidels” reinforces the idea of “genocidal Jihad” which has been used previously by Erdan to describe Hamas’s ideology. The use of the interpersonal marker “they” and the engagement marker “us” puts the audience in a position where they can’t sit idly by, as they are directly affected by the conflict.

(8) Daniel Hagari, October 18th, i24NEWS: *“We are also sharing this information with our partners, first and foremost with the United States, we want the maximum transparency because we take any incident involving civilians very, very seriously.”*

Here (8), Daniel Hagari builds rapport with the audience by using interpersonal markers while explaining to the audience that the Israeli military shares its intelligence with its Western allies. The use of the interpersonal markers “we” and “our” (partners) in such close proximity deepens the relationship between the speaker and the audience.

#### **4.2 Delegitimization of Hamas**

This section explores how Israeli authorities delegitimize the Palestinian side in the contemporary context by comparing them to well-known, negative political entities like the Nazis and ISIS. This line of argumentation strips away the historical context in which the current conflict occurs and assigns similarities between Hamas’s goals and motivations and those of the Nazis or ISIS. This discredits Hamas in the eyes of the audience, and the Palestinians in general, presenting them as irrational radical actors that do not care for people’s wellbeing, but are only driven by hateful ideology and anti-Semitism.

(9) Benjamin Netanyahu, October 12th, IsraeliPM: *“Hamas has shown itself to be an enemy of civilization... Hamas is ISIS. And just as ISIS was crushed, so too will Hamas be crushed. And Hamas should be treated exactly the way ISIS was treated. They should be spit out of the community of nations. No leader should meet them. No country should harbor them. And those that do, should be sanctioned.”*

Equating Hamas to ISIS, is a common tactic employed by Israeli authorities. In (9), Benjamin Netanyahu equates Hamas to ISIS, most probably because western audiences were not entirely familiar with Hamas prior to the October 7th attack. On the other hand, ISIS is a more familiar sounding entity to a western audience due to the war in Syria, where many western nations took part in military interventions against ISIS. Additionally, there were a number of terror attacks on civilians throughout western nations during that period that ISIS publicly took responsibility for. Netanyahu establishes a connection between Hamas and ISIS to provide context on what Hamas stands for, and he wants this to be an undisputed fact, encouraging the idea that “[Hamas] should be spit out of the community of nations.” This metaphor of “spitting out Hamas” outright delegitimizes Hamas in the eyes of the audience.

(10) Benjamin Netanyahu, October 18th, IsraeliPM: “You described what Hamas did as sheer evil. Mr President, you rightly said that Hamas is worse than ISIS. The German Chancellor who visited yesterday said Hamas were the new Nazis.”

The excerpt above (10) is from a conversation between Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Joe Biden, in which the Israeli Prime Minister continues his strategy of delegitimizing Hamas by reiterating the sentiment that 'Hamas is ISIS/ the Nazis', and by attributing these comparisons to other Western leaders like Joe Biden and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Namely, the comparisons to ISIS and the Nazis are assigned to the US and German officials, respectively, implying a level of expertise based on their countries' histories – the United States' prominence in the fight against ISIS and Germany's history with the Nazis.

(11) Isaac Herzog, October 12th, Sky News: *“The press from around the world needs to look at reality. They must declare and call Hamas a terrorist organization without if's and but's, without explanation... These are not freedom fighters, these are terrorists, the worst enemies of humanity that one can imagine. I call upon the International community, unequivocally, make clear and loud condemnation of Hamas just as you condemned ISIS. They are one and the same.”*

President Isaac Herzog, in (11), is calling for the world to discard Hamas's political goals and motivations entirely and to declare it a terrorist organization without further examination. He rebukes the idea of assuming that Hamas are “freedom fighters”, which is a word with positive connotations for resistance movements against oppressive regimes. Instead, he immediately labels them “terrorists, the worst enemies of humanity.” He concludes by drawing an analogy to ISIS, suggesting that Hamas should be treated similarly.

(12) Isaac Herzog, October 12th, i24NEWS: *“It's an entire nation out there that is responsible. It's not true – this rhetoric about civilians [being] not aware, not involved, it's absolutely not true. They could've risen up, they could've fought against that evil regime which took over Gaza in a coup d'etat, murdering their family members who were in Fatah.”*

In this example (12), President Isaac Herzog tackles the idea of innocent civilians in Gaza following a question during the Q&A segment of his press conference. He claims that every resident of Gaza is responsible for the October 7th attack, even the victims of Hamas's internal violence. This delegitimization argument is made to undermine any sympathies the international audience could have for the Palestinian people killed during the bombing campaigns. This is done on the eve of CNN's Abeer Salman reporting that at least 1,417 Palestinians have been killed during the siege on Gaza at that point, including 447 children and 248 women (Salman, 2023). He uses the interpersonal marker "they" in repetition here to highlight the point that the Palestinian people are only to blame themselves for everything that has befallen them.

(13) Daniel Hagari, October 18th, i24NEWS: *"I guess in the first time, because people feel empathy with hearing that someone bombed a hospital, or when they see people are dying, so they go out and do statements. It's okay, and I'm not blaming them of course. And it sounds reasonable. But now after evidence being shown – And I think it serves Hamas. Hamas is a terror like ISIS – it's media and sword. He wants to go to the media – he wants to be viral. That creates viral imagery."*

Here, IDF spokesperson Daniel Hagari addresses the news and images coming out with respect to the bombardment of Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza (13) where an overnight explosion caused an uproar in the International community. The images were of those wounded or dead following the explosion and people calling for an immediate ceasefire. Daniel Hagari makes the argument that the only reason Palestinians display their dead is to garner sympathies. He equates these actions to those of ISIS, who used social media to recruit fighters by posting videos of beheadings, mass shootings, and other propaganda related material (Gerstel, 2016). This comparison delegitimizes the display of the victims of the bombings, not as a call to stop Israel's military campaign, but to recruit fighters. Regarding his use of the phrase "media and sword", he uses sword here as a synonym or shortened version of the phrase "Jihad by the sword", which means "armed fighting in the name of God" in Muslim culture. He uses this analogy to amplify the argument that Hamas's ideology is rooted in religious origins, similar to the radical Islamist fundamentalist ideology of ISIS.

(14) Gilad Erdan, October 27th, AIJAC: *"to Hamas, Gazan civilians are nothing more than mere cannon fodder. Human shields, who in death become pawns for Hamas's lying propaganda campaign."*

In example (14), Gilad Erdan employs the term "human shields" to refer to the Palestinian civilians in Gaza, thereby delegitimizing them not as victims of Israel's bombing campaign, but as tools used by Hamas for protection. International Humanitarian Law studies have argued that "this legal category has been instrumentalized to justify civilian casualties, assigning the entire responsibility to the adversary" (Proy, 2023). As a result, the protection afforded to civilians under International Law during armed conflict is undermined, shifting responsibility away from the Israeli side. Erdan also uses the term "cannon fodder", a derogatory term for soldiers treated as expendables, suggesting that Hamas uses Gaza's civilian population as mere "pawns" in their

propaganda efforts. The metaphor “pawns” likens civilians to the smallest and least valuable chess pieces in “ Hamas’s game” implying that their deaths are cynically used to garner support. He further describes this action as “propaganda”, a term with a negative connotation, indicating a misleading attempt to spread biased information about the situation in Gaza.

(15) Gilad Erdan, October 27th, AIJAC: *“Israel is not at war with human beings. We are at war with monsters.”*

During the same speech, Erdan continues the delegitimization of Israel’s enemy through debasement language. He argues that Israel’s enemy, Hamas, is not composed of human beings, but of “monsters”.

(16) Gilad Erdan, October 27th, AIJAC: *“We have seen that nothing can change Hamas’s genocidal ideology. Sadly, not the rehabilitation of Gaza, not economic incentives, not any promise of a brighter future. The UN tried, many of you tried. But everyone failed, everyone failed. And you know why? Because nothing can change a genocidal ideology. Nothing. There is only one solution to cutting – curing a cancer. It is the evisceration of every cancerous cell... And you remember, 18 years ago, Israel unilaterally withdrew from all of Gaza. We withdrew from all of Gaza!”*

In (16) Gilad Erdan uses repetition of the words “tried”, “failed”, and “nothing” to emphasize the impossibility of ever reaching a peaceful agreement with Hamas due to their “genocidal ideology”. He uses the adjective “genocidal” here to reinforce the idea that Hamas’s ideology is aimed at exterminating the Jewish people and the state of Israel. He reinforces his delegitimization by using the metaphor of cancer and cancerous cells, suggesting that the only solution to the unstoppable growth and spread of this ideology is to completely destroy it. Finally, he references Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza to highlight Israel’s attempt at a peace process, which is a stark contrast to Hamas’s continued hostility.

#### **4.3 Legitimization of Israel’s military actions**

This section sheds light on how Israeli authorities present themselves as the position of morality, authority, and professionalism in the conflict. By depicting themselves as the good side of the conflict, the audience is conditioned into accepting the authority and legitimacy of the Israeli position. Some cases of such legitimization strategies are accompanied by juxtaposition, where the Israeli and Palestinian positions are put into contrast, one next to another. There are also times when only legitimization arguments are made, while delegitimization is omitted, but strongly implied.

(17) Benjamin Netanyahu, October 12th, IsraeliPM: *“... Thank you to the American people for your incredible support for Israel in our war against the barbarians of Hamas... Tony, my friend. I say to you, I say to all of us -- there will be many difficult days ahead. But I have no doubt that the forces of civilization will win. And the reason that's true[Why Israel will win the war] is because we understand what is the*

*first prerequisite of victory. It's what you just said in our meeting – Moral clarity. This is a time – a particular time – a special time – that we must stand tall, proud, and united against evil. Tony, you are taking that stand. America is taking that stand. Thank you for being here today. Thank you America for standing with Israel. Today, tomorrow, and always."*

In a conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken (17), Benjamin Netanyahu uses the metaphor "forces of civilization" to portray Israel as morally superior and aligned with the "civilized Western world". By using interpersonal markers such as "your" and "our", Netanyahu addresses the audience and strengthens the metaphor, including both Israel and the audience in this notion of civilization. This strategy legitimizes Israel's position and suggests that Israel will win the war because it has the support of these "forces of civilization". He also employs the phrase "moral clarity", which has a positive connotation, to argue that the "good guys" always prevail, especially against "barbarians". He even personalizes the interaction by calling Blinken "Tony", which reduces the level of formality and strengthens the connection between the two of them.

(18) Isaac Herzog, October 12th: *"Israel will do whatever it takes 'With an Iron Fist' to change the reality... the people of Israel have always shown their capability of getting up from the Darkest Hour and Rising as Lions and fighting back and showing incredible spirit of unity and friendship and solidarity, I see it all over the nation."*

In this address (18), Isaac Herzog uses metaphors to convey to the audience the strength and resilience of the Israeli people. He explains that Israel will fight back "with an Iron Fist" in order to mend the shattered reality and to restore the time when Israel's borders and security were intact. He goes on by describing the Israelis' ability to "[get] up from the Darkest Hour and Rising as Lions," a phrase which instills confidence in the listener's mind through language that evokes imagery of heroic tales and bravery. This invocation of heroic imagery undoubtedly legitimizes the Israeli position.

(19) Isaac Herzog, October 12th, i24NEWS: *"We are working, operating militarily according to rules of International law, period. Unequivocally. But we are at war! We are at war with– we are defending our homes, we're protecting our homes... Israel abides by International law. Operates by International law. Every operation is secured and covered and reviewed legally."*

In example (19), President Isaac Herzog addresses the concerns of journalists regarding Israel's military actions producing a large number of civilian casualties and the proportionality of those casualties as opposed to military targets. With the repetition of the positively connoted collocation "International law", he attempts to legitimize Israel's military actions by reassuring the audience that everything is done within the boundaries of International law, just as they would expect from a democratic liberal country with western values. He concludes the argument by using more positive connotation words and collocations such as "secured", "covered", and



“reviewed legally” to imply the professionalism of the Israeli army and of their decision making processes.

(20) Daniel Hagari, October 18th, BBC: *“Unlike Hamas, the IDF launched an immediate examination which was overseen at the very highest levels of command. This professional review was based on intelligence operation– intelligence, operational systems and aerial footage, all of which we cross checked the evidence, which we are sharing with you... Accuracy and credible information comes before speed. The IDF acts in accordance with International law. In conclusion, this incident shows how allegations – in this case false and baseless allegations – made by terrorists against Israel can spread and flame tension in the region...We are also sharing this information with our partners, first and foremost with the United States, we want the maximum transparency because we take any incident involving civilians very very seriously.”*

Similarly, Daniel Hagari uses his position as a high-ranking military official and IDF spokesperson (20) to instill confidence into the audience about Israel’s military actions. He uses authoritative and technical terms like “examination at the highest levels of command”, “professional review”, “intelligence”, “operational systems and aerial footage”, “cross checking evidence”, all of which have a positive connotation and allude to the professionalism and sophistication of the IDF, thus, in turn, assuring the audience that the actions taken in Gaza, no matter how they may appear at first glance, are always in accordance with International law. He further legitimizes the IDF’s actions by using the interpersonal markers “we” and “you” to engage the audience that Israel shares their intelligence with their western partners, like the United States. He uses the phrase “spread and flame tension” which uses wildfire imagery to describe the negative consequences of how disbelieving Israel by accepting the word of “terrorists” and their “false and baseless accusations” and accusing Israel of violating International law may lead to further tensions in the region.

(21) Daniel Hagari, October 24th, CBS Mornings:“

-Q: *Some people look at those pictures and think “Israel is at war with Gaza or with the Palestinians” and to that you say what?*

-A: *We are at war with Hamas.*

-Q: *So your message to the Palestinianians is?:*

-A: *Hamas took you hostage, he [Hamas] kills his own people.*

-Q: *The families of more than 200 hostages are in agony right now, can you at least tell them they are alive, and that they are not being mistreated?*

-A: *I cannot tell them that.*

-Q: *Are you saying it’s possible some of those 200 hostages are already dead?*

-A: *We as a country, as we have always been for Israelis, as you say, we’ll do anything to save one soul.”*

In (21), Daniel Hagari takes part in a sit-in interview with US news programme CBS Mornings. When asked about the casualty scale in Gaza, he deflects the accusations back to Hamas, saying that they have trapped the civilian population inside Gaza and they’re the ones

killing them. Later on when asked about the conditions of the hostages, he says that Israel “will do anything to save one soul”. This immediate juxtaposition is an effective tactic to draw the lines of the immorality and morality of Hamas and Israel, respectively. He even uses two separate words with different connotations to describe the civilians on both sides. Palestinian civilians are “hostages”, their suffering is inevitable due to their unfortunate circumstances of living in the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, he describes Israeli civilians who are taken hostage as “souls”. This positive connotation regarding Israeli civilians puts into stark contrast the disproportionate value of civilians in the conflict. This line of argumentation reinforces the legitimacy of the Israeli side while delegitimizing the Palestinian side.

#### **4.4. Loss and gain framing**

This section examines how Israeli authorities frame their arguments drawing on the loss or the consequences as well as the gain or the benefits of their actions. This is a handy argumentation strategy as it solves a dilemma for the audience by weighing the opposing options and concluding what the best possible outcome is. The loss framing is used to convey the risks posed unless some type of action is taken, whereas the gain framing is used to convey the positive outcome of taking some action.

(22) Daniel Hagari, October 18th, BBC: *“We cannot live next to our borders with Hamas ISIS governs that will threaten our civilians and do massacre where you rape women, beheaded the bodies, kidnap babies. Do you understand that while we speak babies are being held in Gaza?! Women, young girls that went to a music festival are being held in Gaza. Dead bodies are being held in Gaza. Old people – some of them were in the Holocaust – are held now in Gaza. How come you take old people?! How come you take babies?! How do you kidnap this kind of – more than, almost 200 people have been kidnapped. How do you do this? Some of them are foreigners. This is what we’re fighting!”*

Here, Daniel Hagari uses the loss framing to his argumentation (22), explaining that the Israeli people can never feel safe as long as Hamas is still present in the Gaza Strip. The “Hamas ISIS” analogy here is used to establish the threat against the citizens of Israel in regards to the ideological juxtaposition. He amplifies the argument by appealing to the emotions of the listeners by painting a gruesome picture of atrocities as a negative consequence of continuing to live next to the “Hamas ISIS governed” area. He continues this line of argumentation through repetition and rhetorical questions. He lists all the demographic categories of captives that Hamas has taken as hostages and ends 4 questions in a row with “are being held in Gaza”. This solidifies the idea that the military actions against the Gaza Strip is necessary to prevent this loss. He continues the repetitive rhetorical questions, this time with the starting word “How” where he asks the audience to put themselves in the position of kidnapping powerless people. Finally, he engages the audience by pointing out that some of the captives in Gaza are foreigners, meaning that Israel fights not only for its people, but for the foreign captives and the countries which they originate from. He, then, provides the solution to the loss-framed argument – in order to stop all of these tragedies, they must take decisive and comprehensive military actions in Gaza.

(23) Benjamin Netanyahu, October 9th, IsraeliPM: *" Hamas will understand that by attacking us, they've made a mistake of historic proportions. We will exact a price that will be remembered by them and Israel's other enemies for decades to come."*

In (23), Benjamin Netanyahu vows that the actions Israel will take in response to Hamas' October 7th attack will be of such a scale that it will deter Israel's other enemies from even thinking of such acts. The metaphor used here, "We will exact a price", signals the disproportionate amount of force Israel will deploy in response to the October 7th attack. His remarks that in order to settle the debt for the October 7th casualties, Hamas, and the Palestinian people more broadly, will pay a hefty price for this "mistake of historic proportions". This is the solution to the loss-framed argument. Netanyahu argues that in order for Israel to provide long term security for its people, the military actions that are about to commence are a sheer necessity.

(24) Gilad Erdan, October 27th, AIJAC: *"...Meanwhile the resolution calls for an immediate ceasefire. A ceasefire means giving Hamas time to rearm itself so they can massacre us again... Any call for a ceasefire is not an attempt at peace, it is an attempt to tie Israel's hands. Preventing us from eliminating a huge threat to our citizens. But the resolution's distortions go even deeper than that. Hamas, the terror group that started this war – I reiterate – is not even mentioned. Not even once. In fact, the only hidden reference to these barbaric terrorists can be found in calls on "both parties". Both parties?! This is a false, immoral comparison between the law-abiding democracy of Israel and genocidal Jihadists."*

In this loss-framing argument, Gilad Erdan argues that any talk of a ceasefire only serves Hamas, as that would enable them to rearm themselves and strike back against Israel again. He uses the word "massacre" to imply that a large-scale attack, evocative of the October 7th attack, is a certain scenario that will happen, should a ceasefire resolution be passed. He uses the metaphor "to tie Israel's hands" which invokes the imagery of a captive, similar to the ones held in Gaza at the time. This strengthens the loss-framed argument that moving forward with a ceasefire solution would turn the entire state of Israel into a captive at the mercy of Hamas. He argues that this is not a solution to peace, but only an obstruction to Israel's goal of defending the livelihood of its citizens. This framing conditions the audience into accepting Israel's logic of what a ceasefire means and why it is an unacceptable measure.

(25) Isaac Herzog, October 9th, i24NEWS: *"Under the dark shadow of war as my nation continues to endure the savage attack from a cruel and inhumane enemy. To my mind not since the Holocaust have so many Jews been killed on one day. And not since the Holocaust, have we witnessed scenes of Jewish women, children, grandparents, and even Holocaust survivors being herded into trucks and taken into captivity. Hamas has imported, adopted, and replicated the savagery of ISIS. Entering civilian homes on a holy day and murdering in cold blood whole families. Young, old, violating and burning bodies, beating and torturing their innocent victims, Jews and Muslims and other faiths. The brutality, the inhumanity, the barbarity of monsters. Not humans. Monstars..."*

In example (25), President Isaac Herzog starts off the statement by describing the current circumstances as “under the dark shadow of war”. This metaphor conveys to the audience the dire situation in Israel at the moment of recording as the IDF were still conducting military operations inside Israel to clear out the remaining Palestinian militants inside its borders. He alludes to the Holocaust, which is one of the worst events in history that saw the murder of over 6 million Jewish people, by comparing the casualties of October 7th to this devastating part of human history. He even makes an analogy to the captives being taken into Gaza on October 7th to the Jewish people being taken into concentration camps in World War II. He uses the phrase “herded into trucks” as a metaphor for the captives, depicting them as a “herd of sheep” being sent for slaughter. This analogy is effective as it paints a familiar image for the audience as they are aware of the circumstances of the Holocaust. He continues the loss-framed argument by painting a peaceful picture that is immediately shattered, which appeals to the emotions of the audience, of civilians going about their lives on a holy day only to get murdered “in cold blood”. Then, not only does he use the adjectives “savage” and “barbarity”, but also explicitly says that the enemy is not human. The debasement terminology used here suppresses any potential sympathy the audience might feel for the devastation that followed Israel’s military actions in Gaza. He then makes a gain-framed argument, that only through “full force” can this threat to the Israeli people be eliminated. The act of killing is described with different collocations here. The Israeli side will “eliminate” the threat as opposed to the “murdering in cold blood” done by Hamas.

(26) Isaac Herzog, October 12th: *“If you have a missile in your goddamn kitchen and you want to shoot it at me, am I allowed to defend myself? Yes! That’s the situation! These missiles are there. The button is pressed. The missile comes out from the kitchen onto my children.”*

In example (26), Isaac Herzog addresses a reporter’s question regarding Israel’s attacks on civilian infrastructures. He argues that the reason why Israel’s safety relies on bombing these infrastructures cannot be disputed. He exaggerates the “kitchen” part of the argument in order to convey to the listeners a previously established argument by the Israeli officials of the extent to which Hamas is embedded into civilian infrastructure, and why these are necessary targets. Through the use of the interpersonal markers “I”, “you”, “me”, he engages the audience to take part in this hypothetical situation. He uses hypophora to ask the audience would “he”, or in this situation Israel, be allowed to defend itself if the audience were “shooting missiles out of their kitchen”, which he immediately answers with a confirmation.

## **5. Conclusion**

Through critical discourse analysis of a corpus of political statements made by Israeli politicians, this paper sought to provide an answer to the research question of how Israeli officials use language to craft convincing argumentation that contextualizes the necessity for their military actions in Gaza.

The analysis of the data in the corpus shows that establishing a common identity with the audience is a central strategy in addressing international audiences. Israeli officials draw proximity to the audience by depicting themselves as a democratic liberal country being at war with a radical Islamist entity that seeks to destroy those western liberal values. They delegitimize the position of the enemies by comparing them to prior political entities, like ISIS and the Nazis that have a broadly understood negative connotation by the audience. They legitimize their position by depicting their military actions as “professional” and “operating according to International law” and juxtaposing them to the savagery of their enemy. The loss- and gain-framing of arguments are also used to accentuate the consequences and/or the benefits of their current military operations in Gaza.

Regarding the linguistic means with which they support their arguments, the politicians mostly rely on metaphors which render Israel as “a force of civilization”, whereas Hamas as “force of barbarism”. They also make use of analogies to past tragedies such as the Holocaust and 9/11 to reframe the severity of the October 7th attack. In addition, their arguments very frequently rest on the use of interpersonal and engagement markers to engage the audience into the fray, as they argue that the future and security of the audience lies in the success of Israel’s military actions in Gaza. The repetition of certain words or phrases as well as the frequent use of positively and negatively connoted words and collocations are employed to further develop an image that cannot be forgotten. This is done when appealing to the emotions of the audience by reiterating the traumatizing events of October 7th. Finally, to further justify the military actions taken in Gaza, Israeli authorities rely on debasement language to dehumanize their enemies, comparing them to savages, monsters, and even cancerous cells.

Unfortunately, the limitations of the research are noticeable, as the war still rages on and new press releases and statements are being made every day. Additionally, the number of speakers analyzed in the research is limited to keep the scope of the investigation focused. The role of the news media is not considered in the research too, although they arguably play a significant role in establishing and driving narratives. Other key actors who have also contributed to the political discourse of legitimizing the Israeli position to a western audience have been western politicians, mainly from the US, the UK, and Germany. However, their speeches were not included in this study to maintain a manageable and focused scope. Lastly, the Palestinian side’s argumentation is not included in the analysis as that would shift the main focus of the research, but that is most definitely a topic worth exploring within future research projects.

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### **Appendix**

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