


COMPLEXITY OF ROLES: ISRAEL'S POLICYMAKING TOWARDS THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

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Abstract

The Russia-Ukraine War has significantly reshaped global geopolitical dynamics, compelling middle and small powers to navigate the competing pressures of global superpowers. This study examines Israel's foreign policy towards the Russia-Ukraine War, which began in 2022 and continues to this day, through the lens of Role Theory, with a particular focus on National Role Conceptions (NRCs). The research identifies three key NRCs—Humanitarian Aid Provider, Mediator, and Strategic Ally—as central to understanding Israel's nuanced and cautious approach to the conflict. These roles reflect Israel's efforts to balance historical alliances with the West and its strategic arrangements with Russia, particularly in the context of regional security dynamics in the Middle East. The study employs qualitative content analysis of official statements made by key actors, including prime ministers and defense officials, to uncover how NRCs guide foreign policy decisions amidst conflicting external pressures and internal political dynamics. The Humanitarian Aid Provider role highlights Israel's commitment to its moral obligations and historical identity, evident in its provision of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. The Mediator role demonstrates Israel's attempt to leverage its unique relationships with both Russia and Ukraine to facilitate dialogue and reduce tensions, albeit with limited success. Meanwhile, the Strategic Ally role underscores Israel's efforts to maintain its commitments to Western partners, particularly the United States, while carefully managing its security dependencies on Russia in Syria. This study addresses a gap in the existing literature by applying Role Theory to Israel's foreign policy in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. It provides valuable insights into how middle powers, like Israel, navigate complex international crises by balancing competing expectations and pursuing strategic flexibility. The findings contribute both theoretically, by advancing the application of NRCs in foreign policy analysis, and practically, by offering recommendations for policymakers facing similar geopolitical challenges. Ultimately, this research enhances our understanding of middle power behavior in an increasingly multipolar and uncertain international order.

Keywords: Russia, Israel, Russia-Ukraine War, role theory, role conceptions, foreign policy.



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ROLLERİN KARMAŞIKLIĞI: İSRAİL’İN RUSYA-UKRAYNA SAVAŞI’NA YÖNELİK POLİTİKA YAPIMI

Öz

Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı, küresel jeopolitik dinamikleri önemli ölçüde yeniden şekillendirerek orta ve küçük güçleri küresel süper güçlerin baskıları arasında hassas bir denge kurmaya zorlamıştır. Bu çalışma, 2022’de başlayan ve hâlâ devam eden Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı sırasında İsrail’in dış politikasını Rol Teorisi çerçevesinde incelemekte ve özellikle Ulusal Rol Kavramları’na (URK) odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma, İsrail’in bu ihtilaftaki temkinli ve incelikli yaklaşımını anlamada üç temel URK’yi öne çıkarmaktadır: İnsani Yardım Sağlayıcı, Arabulucu ve Stratejik Müttefik. Bu roller, İsrail’in Batı ile olan tarihi ittifaklarını ve Orta Doğu’daki güvenlik dinamikleri bağlamında Rusya ile kurduğu stratejik düzenlemelerini dengeleme çabalarını yansıtmaktadır. Çalışma, başbakanlar ve savunma yetkilileri gibi kilit aktörlerin yaptığı resmî açıklamaların nitel içerik analizini kullanarak, URK’ların dış politika kararlarını iç ve dış baskılar arasındaki çatışmalar ışığında nasıl şekillendirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. İnsani Yardım Sağlayıcı rolü, İsrail’in ahlaki yükümlülüklerine ve tarihsel kimliğine olan bağlılığını vurgulamakta ve Ukrayna’ya sağlanan insani yardımlarda somutlaşmaktadır. Arabulucu rolü, İsrail’in Rusya ve Ukrayna ile olan benzersiz ilişkilerini kullanarak diyalog kurma ve gerilimi azaltma çabalarını göstermekte, ancak bu çabalar sınırlı başarı sağlamaktadır. Öte yandan, Stratejik Müttefik rolü, İsrail’in özellikle Amerika Birleşik Devletleri gibi Batılı ortaklarına olan taahhütlerini sürdürme çabalarını yansıtırken, aynı zamanda Suriye’deki güvenlik bağımlılıkları nedeniyle Rusya ile ilişkilerini dikkatli bir şekilde yönetmesini gerektirmektedir. Bu çalışma, Rol Teorisi’ni Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı bağlamında İsrail dış politikasına uygulayarak literatürdeki bir boşluğu doldurmaktadır. Araştırma, orta güçlerin İsrail örneğinde olduğu gibi karmaşık uluslararası krizlerde çelişen beklentileri nasıl dengelediklerine ve stratejik esnekliği nasıl sürdürdüklerine dair değerli içgörüler sunmaktadır. Bulgular, hem teorik olarak URK’lerin dış politika analizine uygulanmasını ilerleterek hem de pratik olarak benzer jeopolitik zorluklarla karşılaşan politika yapıcılara öneriler sunarak katkıda bulunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu araştırma artan çok kutuplu ve belirsiz uluslararası düzende orta güçlerin davranışlarını anlamamıza önemli bir katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Rusya, İsrail, Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı, rol teorisi, rol kavramları, dış politika.



СЛОЖНОСТЬ РОЛЕЙ: ПОЛИТИКА ИЗРАИЛЯ В ОТНОШЕНИИ КОНФЛИКТА МЕЖДУ РОССИЕЙ И УКРАИНОЙ

Аннотация

Российско-украинский конфликт значительно изменил глобальные геополитические динамики, вынуждая средние и малые державы балансировать между давлением мировых сверхдержав. В данном исследовании анализируется внешняя политика Израиля в контексте российско-украинского конфликта, начавшегося в 2022 году и продолжающегося по сей день, через призму Теории ролей с особым акцентом на Национальные ролевые концепции (НРК). Исследование выделяет три ключевые НРК — Поставщик гуманитарной помощи, Посредник и Стратегический союзник, которые являются центральными для понимания осторожного и многогранного подхода

Израиля к этому конфликту. Эти роли отражают усилия Израиля по балансированию между историческими союзами с Западом и стратегическими договоренностями с Россией, особенно в контексте региональной безопасности на Ближнем Востоке. Исследование опирается на качественный контент-анализ официальных заявлений акторов, включая премьер-министров и высокопоставленных оборонных чиновников, с целью выявить, как НРК влияют на принятие внешнеполитических решений в условиях противоречивых внешних ожиданий и внутренних политических динамик. Роль поставщика гуманитарной помощи подчеркивает приверженность Израиля своим моральным обязательствам и исторической идентичности, что находит отражение в предоставлении гуманитарной помощи Украине. Роль посредника демонстрирует попытки Израиля использовать свои уникальные отношения как с Россией, так и с Украиной для содействия диалогу и снижения напряженности, хотя эти усилия имели ограниченный успех. В то же время роль стратегического союзника подчеркивает стремление Израиля поддерживать свои обязательства перед западными партнерами, особенно перед Соединенными Штатами, одновременно осторожно управляя своей зависимостью от России в сфере безопасности в Сирии. Это исследование восполняет пробел в существующей литературе, применяя Теорию ролей к внешней политике Израиля в контексте российско-украинского конфликта. Оно предоставляет ценные аналитические инструменты для понимания того, как средние державы, подобные Израилю, маневрируют в условиях сложных международных кризисов, уравнивая противоречивые ожидания и обеспечивая стратегическую гибкость. Результаты исследования способствуют как теоретическому развитию применения НРК в анализе внешней политики, так и практическим рекомендациям для политиков, сталкивающихся с аналогичными геополитическими вызовами. В конечном итоге, это исследование углубляет наше понимание поведения средних держав в условиях растущей многополярности и неопределенности международного порядка.

Ключевые слова: Россия, Израиль, Российско-украинская война, теория ролей, ролевые концепции, внешняя политика.



Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine War has precipitated a significant reevaluation of global geopolitical alignments, placing smaller states in a precarious position as they navigate the competing interests of global superpowers. Israel, with its historically close ties to the United States and Western allies, presents a compelling case study in this dynamic environment. Despite these longstanding relationships, Israel has maintained a cautious and ambivalent approach towards the conflict, avoiding clearly taking sides.¹ This study seeks to answer the central research question: How do Israel's national role conceptions (NRCs) influence its foreign policy towards the Russia-Ukraine conflict? By examining Israel's diplomatic maneuvers through the lens of Role Theory, the study aims to uncover

¹ Merav Amir, "The Israeli reaction to the war in Ukraine," The Institute for Human Sciences, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.iwm.at/publication/iwmpost-article/the-israeli-reaction-to-the-war-in-ukraine>; Dov Rakov, "Israel's Russia-Ukraine dilemma," Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://aijac.org.au/australia-israel-review/israels-russia-ukraine-dilemma/>

the underlying motivations and constraints shaping its foreign policy decisions.

This study employs Role Theory as its theoretical framework, focusing on National Role Conceptions (NRCs). Role Theory posits that states' foreign policy behavior is shaped by their self-perceived roles (ego roles) and external expectations (alter roles). In Israel's case, NRCs such as Humanitarian Aid Provider, Mediator, and Strategic Ally play a pivotal role in guiding its diplomatic choices. This framework offers a comprehensive lens to analyze Israel's balancing act between historical alliances and strategic dependencies.

Existing literature on Israeli foreign policy tends to adopt either process-oriented or thematic perspectives.² While these works provide comprehensive examinations of Israel's foreign policy, they often focus on historical aspects or broad regional issues, with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dominating much of the discourse.³ Attempts to explain Israel's foreign policy orientation have employed various frameworks, including systemic factors⁴, domestic politics⁵, and leadership⁶. Few studies, however, apply Role Theory to examine Israel's strategic behavior in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. There is a notable gap in applying role theory to Israel's foreign policy, particularly in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War. Recent studies have begun to address Israel's stance on this conflict, but due to its recent nature, this area remains understudied.⁷

This research addresses these deficiencies through several key contributions: First, it offers a novel perspective through role theory, enhancing understanding of Israel's strategic behavior. Second, it provides an in-depth analysis of Israel's policy towards the Russia-Ukraine War, highlighting its balancing act between conflicting international expectations. Finally, it contributes to role theory by demonstrating how role expectations and national role conceptions translate into role performances in a complex geopolitical context. Our approach not only fills gaps in the literature but also offers practical insights for policymakers navigating similar diplomatic challenges. By analyzing Israel's actions and rhetoric, this paper aims to uncover the underlying motivations and constraints that drive its diplomatic maneuvers. This research provides a comprehensive analysis of Israel's strategic ambiguity during the Ukraine War through the lens of role theory, examining both internal (NRCs) and external (role expectations) factors.

To make sense of Israel's foreign policy behavior vis-à-vis the Russia-Ukraine War, we first examine Israel's NRCs as they relate to its foreign policy behavior regarding the

² Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall Israel and the Arab World* (London: Penguin Books, 2000); Daniel Gordis, *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2016); Shmuel Sandler, "Judaism: State and foreign policy," in *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Haynes, (London: Routledge, 2016), 128-141; Ammon Aran, *Israeli Foreign Policy since the End of the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

³ James L. Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Khalidi, R. I., *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017* (Picador, 2020).

⁴ Yacoov Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel, the Superpowers, and the War in the Middle East* (New York: Praeger Pub Text, 1987).

⁵ Juliet Kaarbo, "Influencing Peace: Junior Partners in Israeli Coalition Cabinets," *Cooperation and Conflict* 31/3 (1996): 243-284.

⁶ Yael S. Aronoff, *The Political Psychology of Israeli Prime Ministers: When Hard-Liners Opt for Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁷ Georgy Poroskoun & Yaron Gamburg, "Changing Israel's policy on Russia and Ukraine," Institute for National Security Studies, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/russia-ukraine-israel/>; Dov Rakov, "The Netanyahu Government's Approach to Russia and Ukraine," Washington Institute, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/netanyahu-governments-approach-russia-and-ukraine>

conflict. We then analyze how these NRCs became functional as Israel navigates the role expectations of the West and Russia. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on the role of national role conceptions in foreign policy formulation.

This paper will begin by establishing the theoretical framework of role theory in foreign policy analysis. We'll then outline our methodology, focusing on content analysis of statements from key Israeli political figures. The context of the Russia-Ukraine War and Israel's position will be briefly discussed. The core of our analysis will examine Israel's national role conceptions and role performances in relation to the conflict, considering the interplay between Israel's self-conceptions and external expectations. We'll conclude with a summary of findings and their implications.

1) Theoretical Framework

World leaders often legitimize their actions by referencing the roles their countries play in international politics. For instance, when Turkish President Erdoğan states that his country stands with the oppressed wherever they are⁸, or when Ukrainian President Zelensky declares himself the defender of Europe⁹, or when the US President Joe Biden underlines that the US is committed to boost democracy globally¹⁰, they are highlighting the roles they are adopting within the framework of their respective countries' foreign policy strategies. These roles are crucial as they uncover the ideational background of foreign policies, revealing how states perceive their identities and responsibilities on the global stage. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns within official speeches, policy documents, and public statements to map how Israel's foreign policy behaviors align with the identified NRCs: Humanitarian Aid Provider, Mediator, and Strategic Ally. These patterns are systematically compared to theoretical expectations derived from NRC theory.

Role theory, originally developed in theater and later adapted to foreign policy analysis literature under the international relations discipline, provides a framework for uncovering these roles and their relevance to foreign policy actions. The theory emerged in the 1970s when scholars identified regular behavioral patterns of states in the bipolar Cold War structure, such as "non-aligned," "allies," and "satellites".¹¹ Initially focusing on states' self-conceptualizations by their leadership¹², role theory has since expanded to

⁸ "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: 'Dünyanın neresinde bir mazlum, mağdur, garip, hakkı hukuku ihlal edilen insan varsa tüm gücümüzle biz onların yanındayız,'" İletişim Başkanlığı, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-dunyanin-neresinde-bir-mazlum-magdur-garip-hakki-hukuku-ihlal-edilen-insan-varsa-tum-gucumuzle-biz-onlari-yanindayiz>

⁹ "We fight to defend Europe's way of life - Zelensky," BBC, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/live/uk-politics-64580204>

¹⁰ "Remarks by President Biden at the Summit for Democracy Virtual Plenary on Democracy Delivering on Global Challenges," The White House, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/03/29/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-summit-for-democracy-virtual-plenary-on-democracy-delivering-on-global-challenges/>

¹¹ Kalevi Holsti, "National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 14/3 (1970): 234.

¹² Holsti, "National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy," 237; Stephen G. Walker, et al. "National role conceptions and systemic outcomes," in *Psychological Models in International Politics*, edited by Lawrence S. Falkowski (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), 170; Naomi B. Wish, "Foreign policy makers and their national role conceptions," *International Studies Quarterly* 24/4 (1980): 534.

examine systemic dynamics of role change and analyze complex role sets, including their stability amidst changing power distributions and institutions post-Cold War.¹³

In the context of role theory, role performances emerge from the dynamic interplay between role conceptions and role expectations. These roles are formed through social interactions and influenced by social processes. National role conceptions are the self-perceived roles a state believes it should play, shaped by historical experiences, national identity, and domestic dynamics. These internal conceptions, when interacting with external expectations, lead to specific role performances – the actual behaviors and policies enacted by a state.¹⁴

Role theory offers several advantages for analyzing foreign policy, particularly in complex scenarios like Israel's stance towards the Russia-Ukraine War. It integrates agency and structure, encompassing the roles of all relevant actors.¹⁵ It proves insightful during periods of uncertainty, such as international conflicts.¹⁶ The theory allows for a comprehensive understanding by considering domestic, regional, and international factors.¹⁷ It enables comparative analysis, highlighting unique and common strategies within the international system.¹⁸ Role theory combines qualitative insights with quantitative rigor, enhancing analytical depth and precision.¹⁹ It is especially useful in explaining small and middle powers' behaviors, considering both material and ideational factors.²⁰

By leveraging these strengths, role theory provides a powerful tool for understanding the complexities of state behavior in international conflicts. It offers a more holistic and rigorous analysis than traditional frameworks, particularly when states navigate conflicting expectations from different international actors. In the case of Israel's foreign policy during the Russia-Ukraine conflict, this theoretical approach helps elucidate how Israel balances its role as a strategic ally to the West with the constraints imposed by Russian expectations and countries in the Middle East and Gulf region resulting in a nuanced policy of symbolic support for Ukraine while avoiding direct provocation of Russia.

In this study, the Humanitarian Aid Provider role is identified through official humanitarian aid initiatives and leadership speeches highlighting moral obligations. The Mediator role is assessed via documented diplomatic mediation efforts and bilateral

¹³ Ole Elgström & Michael Smith, *The European Union's Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2006); Philippe G. Le Prestre, *Role Quests in the Post-Cold War Era: Foreign Policies in Transition* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); Hanns W. Maull, "Germany and Japan: The new civilian Powers," *Foreign Affairs* 69/5 (1990/91): 91-106.

¹⁴ Holsti, "National role conceptions in the study of foreign policy," 240.

¹⁵ Michael Grossman, Francis Schortgen & Gordon M. Friedrichs, *National Role Conceptions in a New Millennium: Defining a Place in a Changing World* (London: Routledge, 2022), 15.

¹⁶ Rachel Folz, "Does EU membership matter?," in *Role Theory in International Relations*, ed. by Sebastian Harnisch, et al. (London: Routledge, 2011), 150.

¹⁷ Yasemin Akbaba & Özgür Özdamar, *Role Theory in the Middle East and North Africa: Politics, Economics and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2019), 2.

¹⁸ Omar A. Loera-Gonzalez, *Role Theory and Mexico's Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge, 2023), 4.

¹⁹ Akan Malici & Stephen G. Walker, *Role Theory and Role Conflict in U.S.-Iran Relations: Enemies of Our Own Making* (London: Routledge, 2016), xii.

²⁰ Betül Doğan Akkaş, "Bahraini-Turkish Relations," *Insight Turkey* 26/2 (2024) 213.

meetings with Russian and Ukrainian officials. The Strategic Ally role is examined through Israel's alignment with Western expectations and the constraints imposed by its strategic security dependence on Russia. These indicators allow for a systematic application of NRC theory to Israel's foreign policy behavior.

2) Methodology

In analyzing Israel's stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, this study employs content analysis of statements by key Israeli politicians involved in the decision-making process. Israel's foreign policy decisions are primarily driven by the imperative to protect the Jewish majority domestically while securing the state against external threats.²¹ This priority has led to the circumvention of formal decision-making processes, with the Knesset wielding limited power due to its fragmentation.²² As examined by Magen, Israel's security decision-making as a three-stage hierarchy.²³ Initially, the National Security Council coordinates information from various agencies. Subsequently, the Prime Minister consults with the military secretary and security agencies. Finally, the Minister and Ministry of Defense formulate and approve the final decision.²⁴

Focusing on the actors playing an active role in Israel's decision-making processes during the Ukraine War involves certain challenges, as the Ukraine War coincided with a period of significant internal changes in Israel. Since 2019, Israel has undergone consecutive electoral processes: on April 9 2019, 17 September 2019, 2 March 2020, 21 March 2021 and 12 November 2022. In the elections held in April and September 2019, the incumbent Prime Minister Netanyahu and the leader of the main opposition Blue and White party, Benny Gantz, failed to reach the majority (61 seats) in the Israeli Parliament, and early elections were decided. In the next elections held on 2 March 2020, after the budget dispute between Netanyahu and Gantz, it was declared in December that the government was no longer functioning and it was stated that early elections would be held on 21 March 2021. The March 2021 elections resulted in the formation of an eight-party unity government, with former Yamina Party leader Naftali Bennett and Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid agreeing to become prime minister respectively. It was decided that Bennett would be the first prime minister and Yesh Atid leader Lapid would be the next prime minister in two years. However, due to the problems faced by the country in both domestic and foreign policy, the country went to elections again on 1 November 2022, and after the elections, the task of forming the government was given to Netanyahu again by the president. Therefore, this analysis examines statements from Israeli President Herzog (2021-present), Prime Ministers Bennett (June 2021-June 2022), Lapid (July 2022-December 2022), and Netanyahu (2023-present), as well as the Minister of Defense. The study focuses on (in english) available speeches of israeli leaders containing keywords related to the conflict, employing Mayring's structured qualitative content

²¹ Clive Jones & Emma C. Murphy, *Israel: Challenges to Identity, Democracy, and the State* (London: Routledge, 2002), 93.

²² Charles D. Freilich, "National security decision-making in Israel: Improving the process," *Middle East Journal* 67/2 (2013): 257-266.

²³ Amichai Magen, "Comparative assessment of Israel's foreign policy response to the 'Arab Spring'," *Journal of EuropIntegration* 37/1 (2015): 113-133.

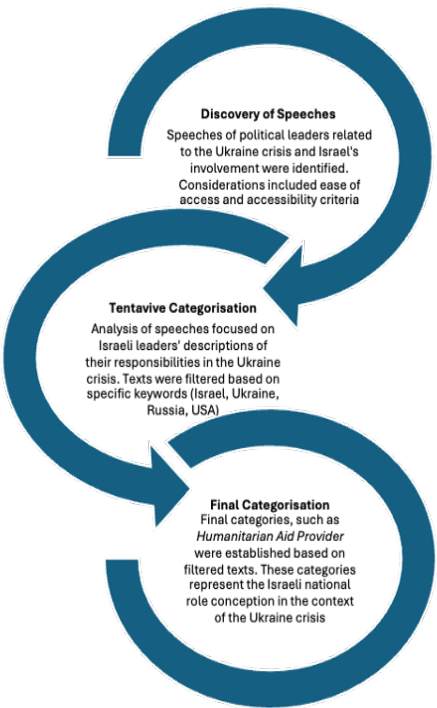
²⁴ Magen, "Comparative assessment of Israel's foreign policy response to the 'Arab Spring'," 114.

analysis method as analyzed in his seminal book.²⁵ The content analysis process begins with identifying relevant speeches, followed by analyzing passages describing Israel's responsibilities regarding the crisis. These passages are then categorized to determine Israel's national role concepts. This systematic approach aims to understand how Israel's self-perceived roles and externally assigned roles have influenced its actions during the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

While acknowledging limitations such as restricted access to decision-makers and the dynamic nature of the crisis, the analysis maintains that valuable insights can be gleaned from the statements of prominent Israeli leaders. By examining these statements, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of Israel's foreign policy complexities, the interplay between its strategic interests and normative considerations, and the broader implications for regional and global geopolitics.

Through this methodological approach, we aim to uncover the nuances of Israel's position in the conflict, revealing how its unique geopolitical situation and historical context shape its response to international expectations and pressures. This analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of middle powers in complex global conflicts and the challenges they face in balancing domestic concerns with international obligations.

Table 1: Sequential Phases in Identifying Israeli Role Conceptions



²⁵ Philip Mayring, *Einführung in die Qualitative Sozialforschung* (Weinheim und Basel: Beltz Verlag, 1999).

3) The Context: Russia-Ukraine War and Israel

The Russia-Ukraine war, which began with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and escalated into a full-scale invasion in 2022, has had profound regional and global repercussions. Independent observers found that more than 120000 Russian soldiers were killed in the war²⁶ while Ukrainian losses are close to 60000²⁷. The war has quickly reinvigorated NATO, highlighting its role in European security and defense, and has intensified tensions between Russia and the Western bloc, particularly the United States and European Union.²⁸ Furthermore, the conflict has disrupted global markets, notably in the energy and agricultural sectors, exacerbating global supply chain issues and causing price volatility.²⁹ The strategic importance of Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region has been underscored, drawing increased international attention and intervention aimed at stabilizing the region and containing the conflict's broader implications.

Israel, despite its condemnation of Russia after initial hesitation, has made considerable efforts to present itself as a neutral actor. Despite being a major arms exporter, Israel has declined President Volodymyr Zelensky's requests for military aid, limiting its support to humanitarian assistance.³⁰ Alongside countries such as India, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates, Israel is one of the few nations whose foreign policy is generally aligned to the West but has refrained from imposing economic sanctions on Russia, much to the frustration of the United States. This cautious approach has surprised many observers, given Israel's often described "special relationship" with Washington and its close ties with the European Union.³¹

Israel's response to the expectations of both the West and Russia during the Ukraine war is significantly influenced by the perceptions of the Israeli political elite of their position in world politics. As analyzed below in detail, Israel aims to navigate acting as a benevolent actor within the constraints of the expectations of Russia and the West. Aiming to provide assistance to Ukraine and possibly end the war, Israel condemned Russia knowing that it had to act within the boundaries of its strategic alliance with the West and partnership with Russia in Syria.³² Ultimately, Israel tried mediating the

²⁶ "120,000 dead and counting: A new estimate from Meduza and Mediazona shows the rate of Russian military deaths in Ukraine is only growing," Meduza, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2024/07/05/a-new-estimate-from-meduza-and-mediazona-shows-the-rate-of-russian-military-deaths-in-ukraine-is-only-growing>

²⁷ "Ukraine's losses in the war," UALosses, accessed 22.07.2024, <https://ualosses.org/soldiers/>

²⁸ Katia Glod, "Europe's dark future: How might a protracted conflict between Russia and Ukraine affect Europe?," European Leadership Network, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/europes-dark-future-how-might-a-protracted-conflict-between-russia-and-ukraine-affect-europe/>

²⁹ Stanislav Zinchenko, "How the Russia-Ukraine war has impacted logistics routes and supply chains," GMK Center, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://gmcenter/en/posts/how-the-russia-ukraine-war-has-impacted-on-logistics-routes-and-supply-chains/>

³⁰ Tol Staff, "Bennett declined Zelensky's request for military aid, report says," The Times of Israel, Accessed 15.11.2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/bennett-declined-ukrainian-request-for-military-aid-report-says/>

³¹ "The Israeli reaction to the war in Ukraine."

³² Jacob Magid, "Condemning Russia on global stage, Israel at UN says Ukraine invasion must end," The Times of Israel, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/condemning-russia-on-global-stage-israel-at-un-says-ukraine-invasion-must-end/>

conflict³³ and provided humanitarian assistance, albeit limited, to Ukraine³⁴ but has refrained from taking substantive actions that would materially alter the situation on the ground, thereby avoiding antagonizing Russia.

Israel's foreign policy in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war is shaped by a confluence of historical, strategic, and demographic factors. A critical element influencing Israel's stance is the presence of a significant Russian-speaking population, comprising over one million immigrants from the former Soviet Union. This demographic group maintains strong cultural and familial ties to Russia, which exerts considerable influence on Israeli public sentiment and political considerations. The necessity to maintain a harmonious relationship with this community is a key factor in Israel's cautious approach to the conflict.³⁵ This has become relevant during the conflict as the Kremlin administration threatened to close the Jewish Agency in Russia, an institution that helps the Jews in Russia wishing to depart for Israel.³⁶ Additionally, Israel's strategic relationships with both Russia and Western countries, particularly the United States, further complicate its position. Historically, Israel has navigated its foreign policy through a lens of strategic ambiguity, balancing its alliances and avoiding actions that might jeopardize critical security arrangements. Adopting such a position, Israel's stance carries similarities with those of Turkey and Gulf States, which have also been ambivalent towards deteriorating their relations with Russia over the conflict.³⁷

The main analytical focus of this study is to examine the interplay between Israel's self-perception (ego roles) and the expectations of key international players (alter roles) in shaping its foreign policy during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The first section of this part will focus on the ego-part role conceptions of Israeli decision makers. Israel's self-perception encompasses its historical experiences, strategic interests, and national identity. By analyzing this ego and alter part, the study aims to elucidate how Israel navigates these dual pressures.

4) The Analysis: Role Conceptions and the Israeli Foreign Policy Towards the Russia-Ukraine War

Israel's foreign policy approach to the Russia-Ukraine War has been characterized by a complex interplay of multiple role conceptions, each reflecting different aspects of the country's national identity, historical experiences, and strategic interests. This section examines three primary role conceptions that have shaped Israel's engagement with the conflict: *Humanitarian Aid Provider*, *Mediator*, and *Strategic Ally*. These roles, while

³³ Barak Ravid, "Inside Israel's failed Ukraine-Russia mediation efforts," Axios, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.axios.com/2023/02/22/israel-russia-invasion-ukraine-bennett-mediation-failure>

³⁴ Emily Rose, "Israel offers help with air-attack alerts, but Ukraine wants interceptors," Reuters, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/israel-edges-toward-air-defence-assistance-ukraine-2022-10-19/>

³⁵ Catherine Dupeyron, "Ukraine war sparks divisions among Israel's Russian population," Worldcrunch, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://worldcrunch.com/focus/the-great-dilemma-of-russian-speaking-israelis>

³⁶ Shaul Kelner, "As Russia threatens to shutter Jewish Agency, many hear echoes of the past," The Times of Israel, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/as-russia-threatens-to-shutter-jewish-agency-many-hear-echoes-of-the-past/>

³⁷ Emil Hokayem, "The Gulf states, Israel and Türkiye: Reactions to the war in Ukraine," International Institute for Strategic Studies, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2023/02/the-gulf-states-israel-and-turkiye-reactions-to-the-war-in-ukraine/>

distinct, often overlap and sometimes conflict, creating a nuanced and multifaceted foreign policy stance by Israel. By analyzing these role conceptions, we gain insight into the motivations behind Israel's actions, the challenges it faces, and the delicate balancing act it must perform on the international stage. This examination not only sheds light on Israel's approach to the Russia-Ukraine War but also provides a broader understanding of how middle powers navigate complex global conflicts while attempting to maintain their strategic interests and international relationships. The following analysis examines how Israel's foreign policy actions during the Russia-Ukraine conflict align with its National Role Conceptions. By systematically evaluating official statements, diplomatic initiatives, and policy decisions, this section highlights how the identified NRCs manifest in practice and where role conflicts emerge.

a) Humanitarian Aid Provider

Israel's role conception as a *Humanitarian Aid Provider* during the Russia-Ukraine War demonstrates the commitment of Israeli decision-makers to provide humanitarian support in global crises. This role reflects a desire to enhance Israel's international image and influence through soft power. This role conception has manifested in other international crises, such as Israel's humanitarian responses to Civil War in Syria.³⁸ Israel's humanitarian role in the Russia-Ukraine War also reflected the country's historical experiences and national identity. As a nation born out of conflict and with a history of providing international aid, Israel's commitment to humanitarian assistance in Ukraine can be seen as a continuation of its self-perception as a country that extends help to those in need, despite its own challenges.

Israeli officials' statements clearly illustrate the country's perception of its humanitarian role. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, in his initial response to the war, emphasized Israel's humanitarian support for Ukraine while maintaining a cautious stance. He highlighted Israel's reluctance to become entangled in the conflict while expressing solidarity with Ukraine.³⁹ Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, on the other hand, issued a stronger condemnation of Russia's actions, calling the invasion a "grave violation of the international order."⁴⁰ This divergence in official statements demonstrated Israel's attempt to balance its humanitarian role with broader strategic considerations. President Herzog further reinforced this stance during his visit to Greece, advocating for peace and Ukraine's territorial integrity without directly criticizing Russia.⁴¹

Despite its commitment to humanitarian aid, Israel faced significant limitations in

³⁸ "Israeli Aid to Syria," Stand With Us, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.standwithus.com/factsheets-israeli-aid-to-syrians>

³⁹ "PM Bennett speaks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky," Prime Minister's Office, accessed 24.11.2024, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/spoke_ukraine; Lazar Berman, "Bennett refrains from condemning Russia in first remarks since invasion of Ukraine," The Times of Israel, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/bennett-refrains-from-condemning-russia-in-first-remarks-since-invasion-of-ukraine/>

⁴⁰ Tovah Lazaroff & Lahav Harkov, "Israel to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine at UNGA – Lapid," The Jerusalem Post, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-698867>.

⁴¹ Greer Fay Cashman, "Herzog joins call for Israelis to immediately leave Ukraine," The Jerusalem Post, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/article-698557>; "Bennett refrains from condemning Russia in first remarks since invasion of Ukraine."

implementing this role. The need to maintain strategic cooperation with Russia in Syria constrained Israel's ability to fully align with Western expectations of support for Ukraine. This resulted in a delicate balancing act, where Israel provided substantial humanitarian assistance while carefully avoiding actions that could antagonize Russia. The complexity of Israel's position was further highlighted by the country's attempts to balance its humanitarian role with its strategic interests, often leading to carefully worded statements that emphasized humanitarian concerns while avoiding direct condemnation of Russian actions.

In conclusion, Israel's role as a Humanitarian Aid Provider during the Russia-Ukraine War was a manifestation of its national identity, historical experiences, and strategic considerations. This role allowed Israel to demonstrate its commitment to humanitarian principles while navigating complex geopolitical realities. The implementation of this role, as evidenced by the statements and actions of key decision-makers like Bennett, Lapid, and Herzog, revealed both the strengths and limitations of Israel's approach to the conflict. Ultimately, the humanitarian role served as a foundation for Israel's broader engagement with the Russia-Ukraine War, influencing its subsequent actions and policy decisions, while also reflecting the country's attempt to balance its moral obligations with its strategic interests in a complex international crisis.

b) Mediator

Israel's role conception as a *Mediator* in the Russia-Ukraine War demonstrates its desire to facilitate dialogue and reduce tensions between conflicting parties. Israeli officials' statements clearly illustrate the country's perception of its mediator role.⁴² In February 2022, before the conflict escalated, Foreign Minister Yair Lapid highlighted Israel's willingness to facilitate dialogue.⁴³ Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's diplomatic visit to Moscow in March 2022 was a significant manifestation of this role, making him one of the first Western-aligned leaders to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin after the outbreak of the war. Bennett emphasized Israel's unique position to act as a mediator, stating, "Even if the chance is not great, as soon as there is even a small opening, and we have access to all sides and the capability, I see it as our moral obligation to make every effort".⁴⁴ Israel's then National Security Advisor Eyal Hulata also highlighted that Israel played a crucial and active role in mediating between Russia and Ukraine, but the persistent belief of both parties that they could prevail in the conflict ultimately rendered these efforts futile.⁴⁵ In addition, according to reports from different relevant channels, Bennett is the "primary international mediator" in the ceasefire talks between the parties. Bennett defended his decision not to send arms or other military aid to Ukraine in order

⁴² Barak Ravid, "Israel's Bennett emerges as key mediator between Putin and Zelensky, Axios, accessed 18.12.2024, <https://www.axios.com/2022/03/09/bennett-mediator-russia-ukraine-putin-zelensky>

⁴³ "Israel condemns attack in Ukraine," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/israel-condemns-attack-in-ukraine-24-feb-2022>

⁴⁴ "Israeli efforts at mediation set to continue," Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.bicom.org.uk/news/israeli-efforts-at-mediation-set-to-continue/>

⁴⁵ Barak Ravid, "Israeli foreign minister promises Zelenskiy more aid, rebuilding help," Reuters, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/israeli-foreign-minister-ukraine-first-time-since-war-began-2023-02-16/>

to maintain his status as a neutral mediator.⁴⁶

This role conception has not been successfully performed by Israel because this role in international relations is often associated with countries that have a significant degree of prestige and neutrality beyond and in its own region. Israel's direct or indirect problematic relations with numerous countries due to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict hinder other nations from perceiving Israel as an impartial mediator. Israel's unique position as a country with experience in numerous conflicts and peace negotiations, coupled with its strategic relationships with both Russia and Ukraine, positions it as one of the few countries with open channels of communication to both sides of the conflict.

Despite its commitment to mediation, Israel faced significant limitations in implementing this role. The country's efforts to maintain neutrality and facilitate dialogue have sometimes been criticized as insufficient by those calling for more robust support for Ukraine. Israel's strategic interests, particularly its need to maintain working relations with Russia due to the situation in Syria, have at times constrained its ability to take more forceful diplomatic stances. In addition, there were warnings among coalition partners in Israel at the time that if then Prime Minister Bennett brokered any kind of deal that included any kind of gains for then Russian President Putin, Bennett would be in a difficult position vis-à-vis Ukraine and its internationally supported leader, President Volodymyr Zelensky. In that case, if those efforts failed, Bennett could be perceived as having the ability to mislead negotiators in order to improve Putin's military position in Russia. This complex balancing act Israel attempted to perform is evident in its efforts to align its mediation with Western diplomatic initiatives while leveraging its unique position and relationships.

In conclusion, Israel's role as a *Mediator* in the Russia-Ukraine War reflects its complex position in the international arena. While the tangible outcomes of Israel's mediation efforts may be limited, the pursuit of this role has allowed Israel to maintain its strategic flexibility and enhance its international standing. The implementation of this role, as evidenced by the diplomatic efforts of Bennett, Lapid, and Herzog, reveals both the potential and the limitations of Israel's approach to the conflict. As the conflict continues to evolve, Israel's mediator role is likely to remain a key aspect of its foreign policy approach, reflecting its ongoing efforts to balance moral imperatives, strategic interests, and international expectations in an increasingly complex global environment.

c) Strategic Ally

Israel's role conception as a *Strategic Ally* during the Russia-Ukraine War demonstrates its efforts to balance its diplomatic relations while prioritizing its alliance commitments with the United States and the broader Western bloc. This role has been a cornerstone of Israel's foreign policy as underlined by multiple Israeli statesman such as

⁴⁶ ToI Staff, "Report: Bennett's political partners warned him Ukraine mediation could backfire," The Times of Israel, accessed 15.11.2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/report-bennetts-political-partners-warned-him-ukraine-mediation-could-backfire/>

Bennett⁴⁷ and Netanyahu.⁴⁸ Israel's active cooperation with NATO and the US Foreign Policy apparatus also reinforces this role.⁴⁹ *Strategic Ally* role reveals Israel's delicate maneuvering to underscore its alliance with the US while maintaining strategic cooperation with Russia, all within the context of the ongoing conflict. A key aspect of Israel's strategic ally role is its approach to military assistance for Ukraine. To perform this role, however, Israel had to consider the expectations of Russia, which hoped that Israel would not take a clear stance considering the security arrangements with Russia in Syria.

The strategic ally role became particularly prominent after Benjamin Netanyahu's re-election on November 1, 2022. Netanyahu's approach to the conflict highlighted Israel's commitment to its Western allies, particularly the United States, while still attempting to maintain a degree of neutrality.⁵⁰ In his statements, Netanyahu emphasized the significance of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, albeit with only a partial condemnation of Russian aggression.⁵¹ The strategic ally role became even more pronounced in June 2023, when discussions within the U.S. Senate highlighted debates regarding the nature of U.S. support for Ukraine. Senator Chris Van Hollen emphasized the need for Ukraine to receive two operational Iron Dome batteries held by the United States. Hollen criticized the Israeli government's blockage of the shipment of these batteries to Ukraine, noting that each battery can protect an area of approximately 150 square kilometers.⁵²

Israel's role as a Strategic Ally to the West in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War has been characterized by a delicate balancing act. On one side, Ukraine and Western allies expect Israel to provide military assistance, while on the other, Russia expects Israel to refrain from such support. Following the onset of the conflict, the president of Ukraine compared the invasion of his nation to the crimes carried out by Nazi Germany during World War II and urged Israel to take a more firm stance against Russia. Volodymyr Zelensky charged Russian President Vladimir Putin of attempting to implement a "permanent solution" on Ukraine during a speech to the Israeli parliament. Zelensky also mentioned the recent Russian missile attack on Babi Yar in Ukraine, the site of the 1941 Nazi massacre of approximately 30,000 Jews over the course of two days. Zelensky's instrumentalisation of the Holocaust issue in order to increase the Israeli administration's engagement in the crisis and his statements were met with reaction by some in Israel. In the face of the statements, the then Israeli Prime Minister tried to empathise with the situation in Ukraine and stated that the Holocaust was very different from what happened

⁴⁷ "Secretary Blinken's Meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Bennett," U.S. Embassy in Israel, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://il.usembassy.gov/secretary-blinkens-meeting-with-israeli-prime-minister-bennett/>

⁴⁸ "The Netanyahu Government's Approach to Russia and Ukraine."

⁴⁹ "Major non-NATO allies," Defense Security Cooperation Agency, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://samm.dsca.mil/glossary/major-non-nato-allies>

⁵⁰ "One-on-one interview with Israeli PM Netanyahu," CNN, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/se/date/2023-01-31/segment/01>

⁵¹ "The Israeli reaction to the war in Ukraine."

⁵² Chris Van Hollen, "Van Hollen, Graham push for additional U.S. support of Ukrainian air defense," Chris Van Hollen, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.vanhollen.senate.gov/news/press-releases/van-hollen-graham-push-for-additional-us-support-of-ukrainian-air-defense>

in Ukraine.⁵³ Similarly, in statements made by different parties and government officials, the Ukrainian leader of trying “to rewrite history and erase the involvement of the Ukrainian people in the destruction of Jews.” Zelensky also distorted the part of his country in the murder of Jews,” said Communications Minister Yoaz Hendel.⁵⁴ Against this background, Israel attempted to retain a somewhat neutral stance on the war under the administration of Naftali Bennett-Yair Lapid, maintaining open lines of communication with both Moscow and Kyiv. Israel has received a lot of public criticism from Ukrainian politicians for not adopting a more assertive posture and for declining to provide air defense equipment to the nation.

After 1 November 2023 elections in Israel, Ukraine continued to express its expectations that Israel would change its attitude towards the crisis after Netanyahu's re-election. Following his appointment, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen met with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov before meeting with the Ukrainian foreign minister, which led to criticism from the Ukrainian side. Cohen's visit to Kiev took some time as the Ukrainian side demanded that Israel increase its financial support to the country and make more statements in favour of Ukraine. Nevertheless, as the highest ranking Israeli official to visit Kiev since the beginning of the war, Cohen received a warm Ukrainian welcome on 16 February. Cohen also met with President Zelensky of Ukraine during his visit and announced the decision to return the Israeli Embassy to Ukraine to continuous activity in Kyiv.⁵⁵ During the meeting, which was carefully monitored by Russia, Cohen refrained from speaking against Russia or even mentioning any Russian-related issues. Cohen promised that Israel would support the UN peace plan for Ukraine and help the country's economic reconstruction process. Israel declined to sell Pegasus, an Israeli-made spyware program, to Ukraine, even after sanctioning its sale to dozens of other nations. In August of last year, a Ukrainian team visited Israel with the intention of discussing the purchase of spyware, but Israel denied their request. Furthermore, Ukraine never publicly requested to use Israel's renowned Iron Dome air defense system because it was aware that Israel would never consent to provide it. Instead, Israel has let private Israeli companies to export robotics and military communication systems to Ukraine. The official request for Israeli-made air and missile defense systems, such as “Iron Beam, Barak-8, Patriot, Iron Dome, David's Sling, Arrow Interceptor, and Israeli assistance in training Ukrainian operators,” came from the Ukrainian Embassy in Tel Aviv in October 2022. However, Israel postponed the request, purportedly due to concerns that the armaments provided to Ukraine would end up in Iranian hands. Israel's lack of air and missile defense systems to defend itself against assaults from Iran or Hezbollah is another factor contributing to its absence from the meeting; this is also impeding the export of

⁵³ Tol Staff, “Bennett empathizes with Zelensky, rejects Holocaust parallel, says mediation ongoing,” *The Times of Israel*, accessed 15.11.2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/bennett-pummeled-by-zelensky-insists-israel-doing-more-than-others-to-aid-ukraine/>

⁵⁴ Tol Staff, “Israeli lawmakers seethe at Zelensky's ‘outrageous’ Holocaust comparisons.” *The Times of Israel*, accessed 15.11.2024, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/israeli-lawmakers-seethe-at-zelenskys-outrageous-holocaust-comparisons/.

⁵⁵ “For the first time since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, an Israeli Foreign Minister is visiting Kyiv,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs Israel, accessed 15.11.2024, <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/fm-cohen-diplomaticvisit-to-kiev>.

similar systems to Kyiv.

Although America desired to mobilize its Western allies to end flights to and from Russia, sever economic ties and impose sanctions on Moscow, including on Russian oligarchs close to Putin, Israel did none of these actions. At this point, criticism from within the Israeli government that “we need to be on the right side of history and the right side of history is not with Putin” drew attention to the US administration’s criticism of Israel, but Israel remained determined not to take any steps at this point.⁵⁶ This is because, according to Israel, there is no legal option to impose sanctions on the assets and citizens of a state that is not defined by law as an enemy state, and no effort has been made to do so.⁵⁷ Moreover, despite Ukraine’s requests for military assistance, including the Iron Dome missile defense system, Israel initially refused to provide anything but humanitarian aid.⁵⁸ Netanyahu articulated Israel’s concerns about providing advanced systems to Ukraine, citing the risk of these technologies falling into Iranian hands through capture by Russia or reverse engineering.⁵⁹ This stance reflects shared security concerns between Israel and the US, rather than a contradiction of their alliance. Israel’s strategic considerations are further complicated by its ongoing security coordination with Russia in Syria. Netanyahu emphasized the importance of the crisis mechanism established with Russia to prevent aerial collisions in Syrian airspace, highlighting the need to maintain working relations with Russia while affirming commitment to Western allies.⁶⁰ Ukraine has increased pressure on Israel for military aid, invoking the Iran card to highlight the urgency of their request. The complexity of Israel’s position was further illustrated in the context of a UN General Assembly resolution on Israel’s occupation of the West Bank. Despite Netanyahu’s request, Ukraine did not commit to voting against the resolution, signaling potential strains in the relationship.⁶¹

In the second part of this role concept, it is necessary to address Israel’s post-war assessments with the wider Western bloc countries. The US’s open support for Ukraine put pressure on Israel to adopt a similar policy. The European Union, which fully supports Ukraine, has criticized Israel’s balancing role, arguing that Israel has placed too much emphasis on maintaining good relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin.⁶² Eastern

⁵⁶ Dahlia Scheindlin, “Should Israel Arm Ukraine? Israeli Generals Speak Out,” Haaretz, accessed 18.12.2014, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-03-16/ty-article-opinion/.highlight/should-israel-arm-ukraine-israeli-generals-speak-out/00000180-5bb5-db1e-a1d4-dff5d2af0000>

⁵⁷ Lazer Berman, “Israel focusing on closing loopholes, not imposing Russia sanctions, officials say”, The Times of Israel, accessed 18.12.2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-not-about-to-impose-sanctions-on-russia-or-oligarchs-officials-say/>

⁵⁸ Robert O. Freedman, Israel’s Tightrope between Russia and Ukraine, Middle East Forum, accessed 12.12.2024, <https://www.meforum.org/middle-east-quarterly/israel-tightrope-between-russia-and-ukraine>

⁵⁹ Iordache, Ruxandra, “Israel’s Netanyahu concerned its defense systems may reach Iran if sent to Ukraine,” CNBC, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/06/29/israels-netanyahu-concerned-its-defense-systems-may-reach-iran-if-sent-to-ukraine.html>

⁶⁰ “Israel’s Netanyahu concerned its defense systems may reach Iran if sent to Ukraine.”

⁶¹ Jonathan Lis & Liza Rozovsky, “PM Netanyahu slams ‘disgraceful’ Palestinian-led UN vote on ICJ: ‘Does not bind Israel’,” Haaretz, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-12-31/ty-article/.premium/netanyahu-asked-zelenskyy-to-vote-against-palestinian-un-request-ukrainian-official-says/00000185-692a-d6a2-adf5-69ea465a0000>

⁶² Aaron Boxerman & Jacob Magid, “European diplomat criticizes Israeli balancing act on Ukraine invasion”, The Times of Israel, accessed 18.12.2022, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/european-diplomat-criticizes-israeli-balancing-act-on-ukraine-invasion/>

European countries in particular stated that Israel should support sanctions against Russia. Although Israel's provision of humanitarian aid to Ukraine and limited support in terms of defense equipment did not fully meet Western expectations, it expanded Israel's diplomatic room for maneuver. Israel has adopted a more cautious approach in order not to spoil its relations with Russia. By maintaining its commercial and political ties with European countries, Israel has adopted a balanced stance in order not to completely distance itself from the Western bloc.

In conclusion, Israel's role conception as a *Strategic Ally* in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War reflects its complex geopolitical position and its desire to be perceived as a loyal ally to the West, particularly the United States. This role involves a delicate balancing act between supporting Western allies, maintaining strategic cooperation with Russia, and protecting Israel's own security interests. While this approach has faced challenges and criticisms, it has allowed Israel to navigate the conflict while maintaining its key alliances and strategic relationships. Notably, Israel's approach does not face significant domestic pressure, with public opinion showing empathy for Ukraine but not translating into demands for increased governmental support.⁶³

Table 2: Israel's Role Conceptions

Role Conception	Definition	Source	Key Statements	Relation to War	Complexities
Humanitarian Aid Provider	Commitment to provide humanitarian support in global crises, enhancing international image through soft power	Israel's national identity and historical experiences	Bennett: "Israel's humanitarian support for Ukraine"	Allowed Israel to demonstrate commitment to humanitarian principles while navigating complex geopolitical landscape	Balancing humanitarian aid with strategic interests; pressure to take stronger stance against Russia
Mediator	Desire to facilitate dialogue and reduce tensions between conflicting parties	Israel's multidimensional relations with both Russia and Ukraine	Bennett: "I see it as our moral obligation to make every effort"	Positioned Israel as a potential bridge between conflicting parties, leveraging relationships with both sides	Maintaining neutrality while aligning with Western positions; limited tangible outcomes from mediation efforts
Strategic Ally	Efforts to balance diplomatic relations while prioritizing alliance commitments with the US and Western bloc	Israel's alliance with the US and strategic interests in the region	Netanyahu: "Israel has obligations under existing agreements with the USA"	Demonstrated Israel's commitment to Western allies while maintaining strategic flexibility	Balancing support for Ukraine while maintaining relationship with Russia; and managing expectations of the West

⁶³ Gadi Zaig, "Most Israelis back government's policy on Ukraine-Russia war – survey," The Jerusalem Post, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-702351>

d) Conclusion

The analysis of Israel's role conceptions as *Humanitarian Aid Provider*, *Mediator*, and *Strategic Ally* in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War reveals the intricate nature of Israel's foreign policy approach. Each role conception stems from different aspects of Israel's national identity and strategic interests, contributing to a multifaceted engagement with the conflict. The Humanitarian Aid Provider role allows Israel to demonstrate its commitment to global humanitarian principles while maintaining a degree of neutrality. The Mediator role leverages Israel's unique position in maintaining relationships with both Russia and Ukraine, although the tangible outcomes of these efforts have been limited. The Strategic Ally role underscores Israel's commitment to its Western allies, particularly the United States, while highlighting the challenges of balancing these alliances with other strategic interests.

These role conceptions are not mutually exclusive; rather, they often overlap and sometimes conflict, requiring careful navigation by Israeli policymakers. The complexities and challenges associated with each role highlight the difficult position Israel occupies in this conflict, striving to maintain its security interests, uphold its humanitarian values, and preserve its strategic alliances. As the war continues to evolve, Israel's approach, guided by these role conceptions, is likely to adapt, reflecting the dynamic nature of international relations in times of global crisis. Ultimately, this analysis provides valuable insights into how middle powers like Israel formulate and implement foreign policy in response to complex international conflicts, balancing moral imperatives, strategic interests, and alliance commitments in an increasingly multipolar world.

5) The Findings: Israel's Role Performance

This section examines Israel's role performances as a Humanitarian Aid Provider, Mediator, and Strategic Ally within the context of the conflict, analyzing how these roles have translated into concrete actions and policies. We explore Israel's efforts to fulfill these roles while managing conflicting expectations from Western allies, particularly the United States, and maintaining its strategic relationship with Russia. These role conceptions have manifested in other international situations, such as Israel's humanitarian responses to global disasters, its mediation efforts, and its long-standing strategic alliance with the United States. By examining Israel's multifaceted approach to the Russia-Ukraine War, we gain insights into the challenges faced by middle powers in navigating complex international conflicts and the ongoing tension between moral imperatives and strategic interests in shaping a country's foreign policy.

a) Humanitarian Aid Provider

Israel's role as a Humanitarian Aid Provider in the Russia-Ukraine War was significantly influenced by conflicting expectations from the West and Russia. While Western allies expected full support for Ukraine, Israel had to consider its security arrangements with Russia in Syria. In the context of the Russia-Ukraine War, this section examines how Israel attempted to fulfill its humanitarian role within these constraints, what it was able to achieve, and the limitations it faced due to competing role expectations. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett emphasized Israel's humanitarian support

for Ukraine in his initial statements⁶⁴, reflecting Israel's commitment to this role.

Israel's role performance as a Humanitarian Aid Provider faced significant limitations due to conflicting role expectations. The need to maintain its security arrangements with Russia in Syria constrained Israel's ability to fully meet Western expectations for support to Ukraine. For instance, while Israel provided humanitarian aid, it initially refrained from sending defensive military equipment that could be used to save civilian lives, such as helmets and flak jackets. This decision was criticized by Ukrainian officials and some Western allies, who argued that such equipment fell within the realm of humanitarian assistance.⁶⁵ Israel's cautious approach was evident in its reluctance to join international sanctions against Russia. While not actively undermining these sanctions, Israel's failure to fully participate was seen by some as falling short of its humanitarian responsibilities. This stance was influenced by concerns about potential Russian retaliation in Syria, where Israel relies on tacit Russian cooperation for its security operations against Iranian-linked targets.⁶⁶

Despite these limitations, Israel was able to achieve significant humanitarian outcomes. The country established field hospitals in Ukraine, provided medical supplies, and offered assistance to refugees.⁶⁷ In March 2022, Israel set up a field hospital in western Ukraine, naming it "Kochav Meir" (Shining Star). The hospital, staffed by more than 60 Israeli medical personnel, treated thousands of patients and served as a visible symbol of Israel's humanitarian commitment.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Israel provided significant material aid. By April 2022, Israel had sent 100 tons of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, including water purification systems, medical equipment, tents, blankets, and winter gear.⁶⁹ This aid demonstrated Israel's ability to leverage its advanced medical and technological capabilities in support of Ukraine. Israel also extended its humanitarian efforts to assist Ukrainian refugees. The country initially allowed entry to Ukrainian refugees who were not eligible for citizenship under Israel's Law of Return, although this policy was later tightened. By March 2022, Israel had absorbed around 25,000 Ukrainian refugees, with about two-thirds being eligible for citizenship.⁷⁰

Israel's role performance as a Humanitarian Aid Provider in the Russia-Ukraine War reflects the challenges of navigating conflicting international expectations. While Israel made significant humanitarian contributions, including establishing a field hospital,

⁶⁴ "PM Bennett attends BGI Airport departure ceremony for the Israeli aid delegation that will establish a field hospital in Ukraine," Prime Minister's Office, accessed 24.11.2024, https://www.gov.il/en/pages/event_hospital210322

⁶⁵ Anna Ahronheim, "Israel won't give Ukraine weapons, will help make missile warning system – Gantz," The Jerusalem Post, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-720028>

⁶⁶ Seth J. Frantzman, "U.S., Israel, and Russia focus on Syria," Middle East Forum, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.meforum.org/us-israel-and-russia-focus-on-syria>

⁶⁷ "Government approves establishing a field hospital in Ukraine," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/government-approves-field-hospital-in-ukraine-14-mar-2022>; "PM Bennett attends BGI Airport departure ceremony for the Israeli aid delegation that will establish a field hospital in Ukraine."

⁶⁸ Julie Stahl, "Israeli Field Hospital Provides 'Hope Without Boundaries' in Western Ukraine," CBN, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://cbn.com/news/news/israeli-field-hospital-provides-hope-without-boundaries-western-ukraine>

⁶⁹ Carrie Keller Lynn, "100 tons of humanitarian aid en route from Israel to Ukraine," The Times of Israel, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/100-tons-of-humanitarian-aid-en-route-from-israel-to-ukraine/>

⁷⁰ "Israel to host 25,000 Ukrainian citizens until the danger subsides in their country," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/israel-to-host-25000-ukrainian-citizens-8-3-2022>

providing material aid, and assisting refugees, its efforts were constrained by the need to balance Western expectations with its strategic interests involving Russia. This balancing act resulted in a nuanced approach to humanitarian aid, where Israel provided substantial assistance in certain areas while showing restraint in others. The limitations faced by Israel in fully meeting Western expectations for support to Ukraine highlight the complex realities of international relations, where countries must often navigate competing interests and alliances. Ultimately, Israel's role performance as a Humanitarian Aid Provider, while substantial, was shaped by the broader geopolitical context of its position in the Middle East and its relationship with both Western allies and Russia.

b) Mediator

Israel's role conception as a Mediator in the Russia-Ukraine War was characterized by a delicate balancing act between its desire to facilitate dialogue and the conflicting expectations from the West and Russia. This mediator role has been evident in other contexts, such as Israel's involvement in peace negotiations between various African nations. In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Israel's mediation efforts were particularly challenging given its unique position of maintaining relationships with both sides while also being closely aligned with Western allies. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's diplomatic initiatives, including his visit to Moscow in March 2022, exemplified these efforts.⁷¹ This section explores Israel's attempts at mediation, the challenges it faced, and the outcomes of its efforts in this complex geopolitical landscape.

Israel's mediation efforts were constrained by the conflicting expectations it faced. Western allies, particularly the United States, expected Israel to align fully with their position on the conflict, which included strong condemnation of Russia's actions and support for Ukraine. On the other hand, Israel's strategic interests in Syria, where it relied on tacit Russian cooperation for its security operations against Iranian-linked targets, necessitated a more cautious approach. This tension was evident in the contrasting statements made by Israeli officials. While Foreign Minister Yair Lapid issued strong condemnations of Russia's actions, calling the invasion a "grave violation of the international order"⁷², Prime Minister Bennett maintained a more measured tone, emphasizing dialogue and mediation over direct criticism of Russia⁷³. The limitations of Israel's mediator role became increasingly apparent as the conflict progressed, with Ukraine's increasing pressure on Israel to provide military assistance. Ukraine's Chief of General Staff, Andriy Yermak, expressed disappointment over Israel's persistent refusal to offer military aid, highlighting Iran's collaboration with Russia during the conflict as a reason for Israel to take a more active role in supporting Ukraine.⁷⁴

Despite these challenges, Israel was able to achieve some success in its mediation efforts. Bennett's Moscow visit and subsequent discussions with Ukrainian President

⁷¹ Roundtree, Cheyenne, "Israeli prime minister breaks Sabbath to meet with Putin in effort to de-escalate Ukraine crisis," *The Daily Beast*, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/israeli-prime-minister-naftali-bennett-breaks-sabbath-to-meet-putin-in-effort-to-de-escalate-ukraine-crisis>

⁷² "Israel to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine at UNGA – Lapid."

⁷³ "Bennett refrains from condemning Russia in first remarks since invasion of Ukraine."

⁷⁴ ToI Staff, "US charges four Russian agents with hacking energy infrastructure around world," *The Times of Israel*, accessed 15.11.2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog-march-24-2022/>

Volodymyr Zelensky demonstrated Israel's ability to maintain open channels of communication with both sides of the conflict. These efforts were conducted in close consultation with Western allies, including the Biden administration, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and French President Emmanuel Macron.⁷⁵ This coordination helped to alleviate some Western concerns about Israel's neutrality and reinforced its role as a potential bridge between the conflicting parties. Furthermore, Israel's mediation efforts provided valuable insights into the positions and motivations of both Russia and Ukraine, which could potentially contribute to broader diplomatic initiatives aimed at resolving the conflict. However, as the conflict continued, the tangible outcomes of Israel's mediation efforts remained limited. While Israel was able to maintain open channels of communication and provide a unique perspective on the conflict, its ability to influence the course of events or bring the parties closer to a resolution was constrained by the broader geopolitical dynamics at play.

In conclusion, Israel's role performance as a Mediator in the Russia-Ukraine War reflected the complex realities of international diplomacy in a multipolar world. While Israel was able to leverage its unique position to maintain dialogue with both sides of the conflict, its efforts were constrained by conflicting expectations from Western allies and its own strategic interests. The limitations faced by Israel in fully realizing its mediator role highlight the challenges middle powers face in navigating complex global conflicts while attempting to maintain their strategic interests and international relationships. Ultimately, Israel's experience as a mediator in this conflict provides valuable insights into the potentials and limitations of third-party mediation in high-stakes international disputes, particularly when the mediating party has significant interests and relationships with both sides of the conflict.

c) Strategic Ally

Israel's role conception as a Strategic Ally in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War presented a complex challenge, as it sought to balance its commitment to Western allies, particularly the United States, with its strategic interests involving Russia. In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, this balancing act was particularly evident in Israel's approach to military assistance for Ukraine and its diplomatic stance. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emphasized the significance of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty while only partially condemning Russian aggression⁷⁶, underscoring the delicate balance Israel was trying to maintain. This section examines the nuances of Israel's strategic ally role, the limitations it faced, and how it navigated the competing pressures from its allies and its own strategic interests.

Israel's role performance as a Strategic Ally faced significant challenges and limitations. The issue of providing advanced defensive systems, particularly the Iron Dome, became a point of contention. Senator Chris Van Hollen criticized the Israeli government's blockage of the shipment of two operational Iron Dome batteries to

⁷⁵ "Israeli prime minister breaks Sabbath to meet with Putin in effort to de-escalate Ukraine crisis."

⁷⁶ "One-on-one interview with Israeli PM Netanyahu."

Ukraine.⁷⁷ Netanyahu's response articulated concerns about the potential for systems provided to Ukraine to fall into the hands of Iran and its associated actors, leading to potential misuse through reverse engineering.⁷⁸ The complexities were further highlighted by increasing pressure from Ukraine for military equipment. Ukraine's Chief of General Staff, Andriy Yermak, expressed disappointment over Israel's persistent refusal to offer military assistance, underscoring Iran's role in the crisis.⁷⁹

Despite these challenges, Israel was able to achieve some success in its role as a Strategic Ally. By providing alternative forms of assistance, such as the potential transfer of artillery shells and the provision of civilian warning systems, Israel demonstrated its commitment to supporting Ukraine and aligning with Western efforts. Netanyahu hinted at the possibility of transferring 250,000 US artillery shells pre-deployed in Israel to Ukraine, suggesting a method where the US would use Israeli ammunition and pass it to Ukraine.⁸⁰ Netanyahu emphasized that the decision-making process regarding such transfers was guided by the United States, highlighting Israel's commitment to its alliance with the US. He stated, "Israel has obligations under existing agreements with the USA," underscoring that bilateral defense cooperation within the framework of Israel-US relations continues to maintain its significance. This statement clearly positions Israel as a loyal strategic ally to the US, even in the complex context of the Russia-Ukraine War.⁸¹ Yet, as Israel considers increasing its support for Ukraine, this could strain its relations with Russia, particularly in the Middle East. Russia's closer military ties with Syria and Iran has a potential to lead Moscow to respond more aggressively towards Israel in regional matters, especially if Israel's support for Ukraine is perceived as antagonistic. As Dunne suggests, the limited humanitarian aid provided by Israel, without further support for Ukraine, effectively amounts to tacit political backing for Russia. This stance risks straining the United States' relationships with Israel.⁸² Israel's approach allowed to contribute to the Western support for Ukraine without directly providing its own weapons systems, thus maintaining a degree of strategic ambiguity in its stance. Furthermore, Israel's ongoing dialogue with both Western allies and Russia allowed it to serve as a valuable source of information and insight for its partners, particularly the United States. Israel's unique position and relationships enabled it to provide perspectives on the conflict that other Western allies might not have access to.

In conclusion, Israel's role performance as a Strategic Ally in the Russia-Ukraine War reflected the complex realities of international relations in a multipolar world. While Israel strove to maintain its commitments to Western allies, particularly the United States, it also had to navigate its own strategic interests and security concerns. The limitations faced by Israel in fully meeting Western expectations for support to Ukraine highlight the

⁷⁷ "Van Hollen, Graham push for additional U.S. support of Ukrainian air defense."

⁷⁸ "Israel's Netanyahu concerned its defense systems may reach Iran if sent to Ukraine."

⁷⁹ Staff, "US charges four Russian agents with hacking energy infrastructure around world."

⁸⁰ "One-on-one interview with Israeli PM Netanyahu."

⁸¹ "One-on-one interview with Israeli PM Netanyahu."

⁸² Charles Dunne, "Arab and Israeli positions on Ukraine war continue to frustrate the US," Arab Center Washington DC, accessed 24.11.2024, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/arab-and-israeli-positions-on-ukraine-war-continue-to-frustrate-the-us/>

challenges middle powers face in balancing alliance commitments with other strategic considerations. Ultimately, Israel's experience as a Strategic Ally in this conflict provides valuable insights into how countries navigate competing international pressures and expectations while attempting to maintain their strategic autonomy and security interests in times of global crisis.

Table 3: Role Performances

Role Conception	Efforts	Limitations and Challenges	Achievements
Humanitarian Aid Provider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Establishment of field hospitals -Provision of medical supplies -Assistance to refugees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Balancing security arrangements with Russia -Criticism for not providing military equipment -Domestic political considerations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Treated thousands at field hospitals -Sent 100 tons of aid -Absorbed around 25,000 Ukrainian refugees
Mediator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Diplomatic initiatives by PM Bennett -Coordinating with Western allies for mediation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Conflicting expectations from Western allies and strategic interests in Syria -Pressure to provide military aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Maintained open communication channels with both sides -Provided insights into the conflict for broader diplomacy
Strategic Ally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Explored alternative military assistance -Potential transfer of artillery shells -Provided civilian warning systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Concerns about potential misuse of military systems -Pressure from Ukraine for more military aid -Broader geopolitical implications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Demonstrated commitment to supporting Ukraine -Ongoing dialogue with Western allies and Russia

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the intricate dynamics of Israel's foreign policy towards the Russia-Ukraine conflict using the framework of role theory. By focusing on Israel's national role conceptions (NRCs) and the role expectations placed upon it by both Western allies and Russia, we have sought to elucidate the motivations and constraints shaping its diplomatic stance. The analysis reveals that Israel's strategic ambiguity is not merely a product of circumstantial pressures, but a deliberate maneuver rooted in its self-conception and the expectations of the international community.

Israel's NRCs, which include its identity as a democratic state, a regional security actor, and a historical ally of the West, are central to understanding its foreign policy decisions. These conceptions drive Israel to maintain a delicate balance between aligning with its traditional Western partners and managing its strategic security interests in the Middle East, particularly in relation to Russia. The findings show that Israel's foreign policy behavior towards the Russia-Ukraine conflict is a complex interplay between these internal conceptions and external expectations, resulting in a policy that avoids unequivocal alignment with either side.

The application of role theory in this context highlights the utility of the framework

in dissecting state behavior in international relations. It provides a nuanced understanding of how states navigate conflicting pressures and articulate their foreign policies in response to both self-perceptions and external demands. This approach not only fills a significant gap in the existing literature on Israeli foreign policy but also offers broader implications for the study of international diplomacy.

Another benefit of applying a role theoretical perspective in the study was to emphasize that the theory serves as a valuable analytical tool to study other states facing similar dilemmas in foreign policy. Future research could similarly apply the framework of this study to examine other challenging cases where states' regional security concerns and global aspirations overlap. It is noteworthy that role theory is currently underutilized despite its potential to provide meaningful insights into the challenges faced by many countries caught between regional security concerns and global expectations. By extending the application of role theory to similar cases, scholars can further enhance its theoretical utility and delve deeper into the international roles and role dynamics of states.

The application part of the study also points to the potential of role theory to bridge the gap between foreign policy analysis and broader international relations theories. This potential allows scholars to go beyond mainstream foreign policy theories and approaches by integrating different social science concepts such as identity, perception and expectation into foreign policy decision-making processes. Future research could explore how role theory interacts with constructionist approaches through different case studies or how non-state actors interact with the role of non-state actors in global politics.

For policymakers, the insights gained from this analysis underscore the importance of recognizing the multifaceted nature of national role conceptions and their impact on foreign policy. As states like Israel continue to operate in an increasingly polarized global environment, understanding the interplay between NRCs and role expectations will be crucial for formulating strategies that effectively manage international relationships and security imperatives.

In conclusion, Israel's cautious and ambivalent approach to the Russia-Ukraine conflict exemplifies the strategic calculus inherent in its national role conceptions. By leveraging role theory, this research sheds light on the underlying drivers of Israel's foreign policy, offering both theoretical advancements and practical guidance for navigating the complexities of modern statecraft. The insights from this study contribute to a deeper understanding of how states like Israel balance competing international expectations, reinforcing the relevance of role theory in contemporary geopolitical analyses.



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