

The Holocaust, Securitization of Iran and Israel's Iran Policy Yahudi Soykırımı, Güvenikleştirme ve İsrail'in İran Politikası

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Abstract

Any attempt to understand Israel's securitized policy towards Iran requires a careful investigation of the historical memories of the Jewish people. In this context, the Holocaust is an important trauma to understand Israeli foreign policy towards Iran. The Holocaust has been present in the thoughts of Israel's leaders, and these people have lived in the shadow of the trauma of total destruction. The Holocaust's influence is so evident that many political actors in Israel believe that Iran is to be prevented not to have nuclear capability. In this regard, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has worked tirelessly to securitize the Iranian nuclear program in order to justify using any means necessary to prevent Iran from attaining a nuclear weapon. The aim of this article is to try to scrutinize why Israeli leaders want to take actions against Iran which may not be within the range of accepted norms within the international community, and is to show how the memory of the Holocaust was reflected in the foreign policy of Israel towards Iran.

Keywords: *Israel, Iran, Securitization, Foreign Policy, the Holocaust.*

Öz

İsrail'in güvenikleştirilmiş İran politikasını anlamak için Yahudi halkının tarihi geçmişinin incelenmesi önem arz etmektedir. Bu açıdan, Yahudi soykırımı, İran politikasının incelenmesinde dikkate alınması gereken önemli bir tarihi travmadır. Soykırım, gerek İsraili liderler, gerekse Yahudi halkının bilincinde önemli bir yer tutmaya devam etmektedir. Soykırımın etkisi İran'ın nükleer yeteneklere sahip olmasının engellenmesinin gerekliliğine olan İsraili liderlerin sahip oldukları inancı pekiştirmektedir. Bu nedenle, Başbakan Benjamin Netanyahu İran'ın nükleer programını güvenikleştirmeye ve İran'ın nükleer silahlara sahip olmasının engellenmesi için gerekli olan her yolun denenmesine çalışmaktadır. Bu çalışma, İsraili yetkililerin İran'a karşı neden olağanüstü sayılabilecek ve uluslararası toplumun kabul edemeyeceği önlemlerin alınmasında ısrarcı olduklarını ve bu kapsamda soykırımın İsrail'in İran politikasını nasıl etkilediğini açıklamaya çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *İsrail, İran, Güvenikleştirme, Dış Politika, Yahudi Soykırımı.*

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INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy of a state is shaped by various factors, such as historical experience, national character, or cultural heritage, which are either systemic or domestic elements. In this sense, historical experience can be examined as one of the important elements influencing Israel's foreign policy, and Israeli policy formation towards Iran cannot be evaluated without giving specific attention to the Holocaust. This tragedy was an unparalleled national catastrophe in the history of the Jews, and its effects have also been influential on the Jewish people and its leaders after the State of Israel was born. The Holocaust has been present in the thoughts of Israel's leaders, and these people have lived in the shadow of the trauma of total destruction.

The memory of the Holocaust as a key event in Jewish history has far-reaching effects both on the Jewish people and Israel's policy makers. It has become an important factor of legitimization for Israel's policy towards Iran. That's why the relations between Israel and Iran have been at the forefront of international events, mainly because of the remarks of Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad and Iran's nuclear program. Israeli leaders have believed that Iran, after the revolution in 1979, has negative feelings towards the Jewish state. This thought in turn has made them try to take drastic measures in order to prevent possible danger. On the other hand, the rhetoric of the leaders of Iran about Israel has only exacerbated the situation.

On 14 July 2015, it was announced that the negotiators reached a historical agreement to deal with Iranian nuclear program. Negotiations between Iran and the so-called P5+1 countries (the US, UK, Russia, China, France and Germany) were continuing since 2006.¹ The deal includes limits on Iran's nuclear activities, and in exchange of these limits, Iran would be relieved from sanctions while "continuing its atomic program for peaceful purposes."² After the deal was declared, there have been different comments about it. Even though the US Secretary of State John Kerry said that "'Israel is safer' as a result of the nuclear accord," current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other leaders "blasted," security cabinet rejected the accord and stressed that "Israel reserves the right to take action to protect the state."³

The Holocaust's influence is so evident that many political actors in Israel believe that Iran is to be prevented not to have nuclear capability. In this regard, Netanyahu has worked tirelessly to securitize the Iranian nuclear program in

¹ "Iran Nuclear Talks: 'Historic' Agreement Struck," *BBC*, 14 July 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33518524> (Accessed: 22.11.2015).

² Jethro Mullen and Nic Robertson, "Landmark Deal Reached on Iran Nuclear Program," *CNN*, 15 July 2015, <http://www.edition.cnn.com/2015/07/14/politics/iran-nuclear-deal/> (Accessed: 22.11.2015).

³ William Booth and Ruth Eglash, "Israeli Leaders Condemn Iran Deal, 'One of the Darkest Days in World History'," *The Washington Post*, 14 July 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/israel-blasts-iran-deal-as-dark-day-in-history/2015/07/14/feba23ae-0018-403f-82f3-3cd54e87a23b_story.html (Accessed: 22.11.2015).

order to justify using any means necessary to prevent Iran from attaining a nuclear weapon. According to him and to many others in Israeli politics and security organizations, Israel must be prepared to launch a strike against Iran to prevent a potential second Holocaust. Even though the Arab Spring has created a new and challenging environment in the Middle East for Israel, for Netanyahu Iran “is more dangerous than ISIS,” the radical “group that has captured vast parts of Iraq and Syria.”⁴

A country which feels it is in danger may decide that the struggle of survival is so strong that all means can be used. Israeli leaders feel that its existence is threatened by Iran, and they maintain the central belief that any probable second Holocaust should be prevented before it might happen. And, in this very situation, the objective of this article is to examine why the securitization of Iran has been a significant foreign policy issue for Israel. Here it is argued that any attempt to understand Israel’s securitized policy towards Iran requires a careful investigation of the historical memories of the Jewish people. In this context, in this article, the burden of the past, the traumatic collective memory of the Holocaust and its influence on the policy makers shall be analyzed. The aim of this article is to try to scrutinize why Israeli leaders want to take actions against Iran which may not be within the range of accepted norms within the international community, and is to show how the memory of the Holocaust was reflected in the foreign policy of Israel towards Iran.

1. THE HOLOCAUST AND ITS IMPACT ON ISRAEL’S SECURITY POLICY

The destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD by the Romans is a watershed event in Jewish history, marking the end of sovereignty and the start of diaspora.⁵ Jews were expelled from their promised land in Palestine to the whole Roman world (and even beyond). Diaspora life was not a neutral experience; it was a life lived in exile, the Jews lacked autonomous political organisation, and they were stated as “a pariah people.”⁶ Jews scattered throughout the world have suffered great persecution from those who disliked them. They are one of the human groups who probably experienced more hostility and hatred than others in history. Jewish life was largely closed off from the outside world, and they were forced to live in ghettos. Throughout their history, the Jewish people have been despised and they have endured persecution, massacre, murder and pogroms. After they were murdered in pogroms and massacres for centuries, in modern times the Holocaust continued this saga of Jewish suffering, destroying six million innocent victims in the most terrible circumstances.⁷

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987), 136-43.

⁶ Arnaldo Momigliano, “A Note on Max Weber’s Definition of Judaism as a Pariah-Religion,” *History and Theory* 19, No.3 (1980), 313.

⁷ Rubinstein et al., *The Jews in the Modern World A History Since 1750* (New York: Arnold Publishers, 2002), 110.

Anti-Semitism had already existed in the ancient world, and Jews were a convenient community of others to point to as scapegoats. They were blamed for the death of Christ from the times of early Christianity, were subject to blood libels, were blamed for killing Christian children, poisoning wells and bringing plague to communities.⁸ Hostility to Jews grew and manifested itself in a variety of ways. Two of the most notorious anti-Semitic accusations against Jews were the so-called "blood libel" and "host desecration." In medieval Europe, violent anti-Semitism probably increased significantly, especially with the promulgations of the blood libel, the allegation that Jews were using the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes.⁹ The second such charge made against Jews was that of host desecration. It was the accusation that the Jews poisoned the blood and bread employed by Catholic priests in the Mass. Besides these two well-known charges, the Jews were also subjected to many other kinds of abuses, such as the depictions of the Jews portrayed as the murderers of Christians.¹⁰ The Holocaust was the latest of the persecutions in history, which was full of massive slaughters of Jews.

Anti-Semitic events were witnessed in almost all the places the Jews lived; however, once Hitler came to power, he paved the way to the most horrific event in the Jewish history, the Holocaust. According to Hitler, the Jews were Germany's principle adversary.¹¹ He thought that the Jews must have remained in their ghettos, and must not have entered to the German society, because they were a deadly germ that would harm it. For him, there could be only one solution, the Holocaust. The centrality of the Holocaust in Jewish identity has been unparalleled. The Holocaust both "formed the collective identity" of Israel and has been the "shadow" in which "the most fateful decisions in Israeli history" were conceived.¹² It has formed a twentieth century link with an established narrative of two millennia¹³ of Jewish history which is remembered as being marked by expulsions, pogroms, and persecution.¹⁴

After Israel was established, it faced the enmity of most of its neighbors, and fought war after war. The world was often viewed by many Israeli policy-makers, and by much of the Israeli public, as an inhospitable place, at best indif-

⁸ Gabrielle Grossman, "The Re-shaping of Anti-Semitism Through the Ages," *The Journal of Psychohistory* 41, No.3 (2014), 198.

⁹ Allan Mohl, "The Evolution of Anti-Semitism: Historical and Psychological Roots," *The Journal of Psychohistory* 39, No.2 (2011), 119-21.

¹⁰ Rubinstein et al., *The Jews in the Modern World*, 111-12.

¹¹ Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims and Bystanders The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), 10.

¹² Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Henry Holt, 1991), 11.

¹³ Alan Dowty, "Israeli Foreign Policy and the Jewish Question," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 3, No.1 (1999), 4.

¹⁴ Judith Elizur, "The Fracturing of the Jewish Self-Image: The End of 'We Are One'?", From *The Israel: The First Hundred Years, Volume III Israeli Politics and Society Since 1948 Problems of Collective Identity* (ed.) Efraim Karsh, (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 14.

ferent to the fate of the Jews. This has profoundly affected the attitudes of the policy-makers toward foreign policy. “The re-interpretation of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust contributed to a highly Hobbesian perception of international order in Israel.”¹⁵ This perception was clearly expressed in Prime Minister Menachem Begin’s book, *The Revolt*: “The world does not pity the victims; it respects the warriors. Good or bad-that is how it is.”¹⁶

Historical analogies could be employed by individuals or communities agents when they confront new conditions. They compare new circumstances with a past situation, which is retrieved from memory. In this context, the Holocaust is an important collective trauma for the Jewish people, is a significant source for analogy, and its place in Israel’s security policy results from this analogical process. Such traumas “refuse to remain buried in the back reaches of human memories...Just as traumas at the individual level reappear in intrusive flashbacks and psychological disorders...collective traumas from the past continue to have a living influence upon the contemporary present.”¹⁷ The influence of the Holocaust as an analogy in the Jewish people’s collective memory, and specifically in Israel’s security doctrine, has been pervasive throughout Israel’s short history. “Israeli national security policy” has always “been predicated on a broad national consensus, which holds that Israel faces a realistic threat of genocide, or at a minimum, of politicide.”¹⁸ The national security conception of any state is affected by both environmental and internal factors, and by how these factors are perceived by leaders. On the other hand, the perception of the leaders is affected by the collective traumatic memories of the Jewish people, as well as the Holocaust.¹⁹ In this context, the memory of the Holocaust has been present in the thoughts of Israeli leaders, and they have lived in the shadow of the trauma of total destruction which would be a possibility based on Jewish people’s historical experience.

The trauma from the Holocaust was consolidated by the Arab attacks in the immediate afterwards of the establishment of Israel, and created the belief that Arab states’ first foreign policy priority was the destruction of Israel. This sense of insecurity has been heightened by the spectre of the Holocaust. After the World War II, many Jewish survivors of the Holocaust arrived in Israel. In the early 1950s, “one out of every three Israelis was a survivor... (which constituted) a total of 350,000.”²⁰ Thus, the physical embodiment of the Holocaust

¹⁵ Ofira Seliktar, *New Zionism and the Foreign Policy System of Israel* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 107.

¹⁶ Asher Arian, *Security Threatened Surveying Israeli Opinion on Peace and War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 163.

¹⁷ Ridwan Nytagodien and Arthur Neal, “Collective Trauma, Apologies, and the Politics of Memory,” *Journal of Human Rights* 3, (2004), 468.

¹⁸ Charles D. Freilich, “National Security Decision-Making in Israel: Processes, Pathologies, and Strengths,” *Middle East Journal* 60, No.4 (2006), 636.

¹⁹ Uri Bar-Joseph, “Towards a Paradigm Shift in Israel’s National Security Conception,” *Israel Affairs* 6, No.3/4 (2000), 99.

²⁰ Julia Resnik, “‘Sites of Memory’ of the Holocaust: Shaping National Memory in the Education

has been ever-present in Israeli society. For this reason, the Holocaust played a major role in explaining Israel's position in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and almost every major crisis in Israel's history was seen as a threat to its existence.

The psychological power of the memory of the Holocaust over the Jewish people has shown itself in different instances of national insecurity. In this regard, almost every war of Israel has been conceptualized by its leaders in terms of the Holocaust.²¹ The period of tension, the three weeks prior to the Six Day War of 1967, was especially significant in collective memory of the Jewish people as a time when the fear of national catastrophe was extraordinarily tangible. Israel's leaders evoked the memories of the extermination of Jewish people during the Holocaust to emphasize the importance of maintaining national security. This period of time was marked by repeated references to the Holocaust. Even Abba Eban, Israel's most famous foreign minister and one of the moderate leaders, named Israel's boundaries at that time as "Auschwitz borders."²² When he addressed to the UN Security Council in June 1967, he clearly expressed what the State of Israel meant for him with respect to Holocaust: "The State thus threatened with collective assassination was itself the last sanctuary of a people which had seen six million of its sons exterminated by a more powerful dictator two decades before."²³ During the same period of time, Yitzhak Rabin, the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defence Forces, also pointed the existential threat Israel faced which was a reflection of the Holocaust: "We have no alternative but to answer the challenge forced upon us, because the problem is not the freedom of navigation, the challenge is the existence of the State of Israel, and this is a war for that very existence."²⁴ On the other hand, the then Defence Minister Moshe Dayan of Yom Kippur War remembered the time when Israel was attacked by Egypt and Syria in 1973 in such a way that "I could recall no moment in the past when I had felt such anxiety? Israel was in danger, and the results could be fatal if we did not recognize and understand the new situation in time."²⁵

Begin was one of the important leaders who was affected by the negative experiences of the Jewish history. His conduct of Israel's foreign policy was a product of his own life experiences.²⁶ He encountered as a youth the anti-Semitism in Brest-Litovsk, and his family was killed during the Holocaust.

System in Israel," *Nations and Nationalism* 9, No.2 (2003), 304.

²¹ Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.

²² Avraham Burg, *The Holocaust is Over; We Must Rise from its Ashes* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 21.

²³ Michael Brecher, *Decision in Crisis Israel, 1967 and 1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 38.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁵ Moshe Dayan, *Story of My Life* (New York: William Morrow, 1976), 494.

²⁶ Avi Shlaim, "The Likud In Power: The Historiography of Revisionist Zionism," *Israel Studies* 1, No.2 (1996), 282.

It was apparent that his intellectual and political identity and worldview was shaped by the pervasive and deadly anti-Semitism of the 1930s and the Holocaust.²⁷ The trauma of the Holocaust particularly affected Begin's political opinions. During his political life, he usually viewed events through "the prism of the 1930s," and "drew analogies with events in this period."²⁸ In this respect, Begin did believe that the State of Israel and the Jewish people at large were surrounded by hostile Gentiles (non-Jewish people), where they would forever live with the threat of destruction by them. Begin's personal experiences of the Holocaust had a significant role in shaping his views with regards to the Arab-Israeli and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He and his associates shared a sincere conviction that at the heart of the problem lay the anti-Semitism of the Arab world and their devotion to destroy the Jewish people.²⁹ In fact the Holocaust was part of what the Jewish people would expect from the Gentiles. As in his book *The Revolt*, Begin wrote:

"Ask the Jews: Is it possible to destroy a people? Is it possible to annihilate millions of people in the twentieth century? And what will the 'world' say? The innocent ones! It is hard to believe, but even in the twentieth century it is possible to destroy an entire people; and if the annihilated people happens to be Jewish, the world will be silent and will behave as it usually behaves."³⁰

The Holocaust has played a central role in the conception and rhetoric of Begin throughout his political life. His one important decision as a leader was to launch an air-strike against the Iraqi nuclear reactor of Osiraq in 1981. This was an important example of how the Holocaust affected a leader's policy-making. For Begin, the spread of nuclear weapons to Iraq would create a new Holocaust, which would cause the total destruction Israel. For this reason, he approved military action against Iraq's nuclear reactor, and relieved Israel of nuclear fears after the successful air strike.³¹ The psychology of the Holocaust played a significant role in his decision. He understood the threat posed by Iraq in Holocaust-laden terms, and demonstrated it in his declaration that he would "not be the man in whose time there will be a second Holocaust."³² It was evident that his decision was prompted by his fear of a new Holocaust. While responding to international criticism after the bombing of the reactor, he declared:

²⁷ Arian, *Security Threatened*, 163.

²⁸ Ilan Peleg, *Begin's Foreign Policy, 1977-1983 Israel's Move to the Right* (Westport: Greenwood, 1987), 66.

²⁹ Ilan Peleg, "The Zionist Right and Constructivist Realism: Ideological Persistence and Tactical Adjustment," *Israel Studies* 10, No.3 (2005), 137.

³⁰ Arian, *Security Threatened*, 163.

³¹ Efraim Inbar, "Israeli National Security, 1973-1996," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 555, No.1 (1998), 68.

³² Rafael Eitan, "The Raid on the Reactor from the Point of View of the Chief of Staff," From *The Israel's Strike Against the Iraqi Nuclear Reactor 7 June, 1981*, (Jerusalem: Menachem Begin Heritage Center, 2003), 31.

“We have a special reason to guard our people: a million and a half children were poisoned by a gas called Cyclon B. There is no difference between poisons. Radioactivity is also a poison..Two, three years, at the most four years, and Saddam Hussein would have produced his three, four, five bombs, what should, what could we have done in the face of such a present, direct, horrifying peril? Nothing. Then this country, and this people, would have been lost, after the Holocaust. Another holocaust would have happened in the history of the Jewish people. Never again, never again.”³³

The Osiraq strike was a consequence of Begin's genocidal threat perception. It was “a clear and unequivocal consequence of the Holocaust,” which showed that “the State of Israel would never allow an enemy country that aspires to destroy it to develop, manufacture or purchase weapons of mass destruction.”³⁴ As Moshe Nissim, a member of the Ministerial Committee on Security Affairs, emphasized, “the memory of the Holocaust in which six million Jews perished, including one and a half million children, remained before his (Begin's) eyes throughout all the discussions, including the statement the Cabinet issued following the operation.”³⁵ In a similar vein, before Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, Begin justified the war with the following terms: “In the Land of Israel we are condemned to fight with all our soul. Believe me, the alternative is called ‘Auschwitz.’ We are determined to do everything to prevent another Auschwitz.”³⁶

In relation with Holocaust, there has been a consistent record of Israeli leaders associating Arab adversaries with Adolph Hitler. During the Six Day War the politicians compared President Nasser of Egypt to Hitler,³⁷ whereas in 1982 Begin sent “the Israeli army to Beirut to destroy Adolph Hitler.”³⁸ This pattern has been identified as an Israeli urge “to revive and obliterate Hitler over and over again.”³⁹ Moreover, many leaders from Likud, the main right-wing party of Israel, presented the Arabs as the reincarnation of Nazis, likened PLO leader Yasser Arafat to Hitler, and frequently reminded the Holocaust with respect to the security of Israel.⁴⁰

³³ Dov Waxman, *The Pursuit of Peace and The Crisis of Israeli Identity Defending/Defining the Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 56.

³⁴ Arye Naor, “Analysis of the Decision-Making Process,” From *The Israel's Strike Against the Iraqi Nuclear Reactor 7 June, 1981*, (Jerusalem: Menachem Begin Heritage Center, 2003), 25.

³⁵ Moshe Nissim, “Leadership and Daring in the Destruction of the Iraqi Reactor,” *From the Israel's Strike Against the Iraqi Nuclear Reactor 7 June, 1981*, (Jerusalem: Menachem Begin Heritage Center, 2003), 20.

³⁶ Waxman, *The Pursuit of Peace*, 56.

³⁷ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 297.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 402.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 400.

⁴⁰ Arye Naor, “The Security Argument in the Territorial Debate in Israel: Rhetoric and Policy,” *Israel Studies* 4, No.2 (1999), 154.

On the other hand, even though the Scud attacks during the 1991 Gulf War did little physical damage, the psychological effects were immense. The fear of chemical warfare evoked memories of the Holocaust.⁴¹ The probability of a chemical warfare and its association with the Holocaust caused public fear as if such weapons were deployed.⁴² In this context, the Jewish historic experience of previous centuries and the Holocaust have far-reaching effects on the Israeli public,⁴³ and as the former Knesset (Israeli Parliament) Speaker declared as late as 2008 that

“The list of Shoah (Holocaust) manifestations in daily life is long. Listen to every word spoken and you find countless Shoah references. The Shoah pervades the media and the public life, literature, music, art, education. These overt manifestations hide the Shoah’s deepest influence. Israel’s security policy, the fears and paranoia, feelings of guilt and belonging are products of the Shoah...Sixty years after his suicide in Berlin, Hitler’s hand stil touches us...Every year Israel naturalizes the Shoah victims who were dead even before we were born, embracing them into the bosom of the third State of Israel.”⁴⁴

2. A SHORT HISTORY OF ISRAEL-IRAN RELATIONS

The relations between Israel and Iran began after Israel was born in 1948. The relationship between two states was not so hostile as of now. Prior to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, they shared interests, developed informal relations, and cooperated in different areas. Both Iran and Israel perceived the other to be a necessary partner in the region for its own interests and concerns. For Israel, developing relations with Iran was part of Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion’s periphery policy. To counter threats from the surrounding Arab states, he tried to make alliances with non-Arab nations situated on the periphery of the Middle East, namely Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia.⁴⁵ He argued that “it is possible that through contacts with the peoples of the outer zone of the area (Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia) we shall achieve friendship with the peoples of the inner zone, who are our immediate neighbors.”⁴⁶ In this context, Iran was an important country for Israel due to its strategic location, size, and economic potential.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Jacob Abadi, “The Gulf War and its Implications for Israel,” *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 17, No.3 (1994), 56.

⁴² Dowty, “Israeli Foreign Policy and the Jewish Question,” 6.

⁴³ Efraim Inbar, *Israel’s National Security Issues and Challenges since the Yom Kippur War* (London: Routledge, 2008), 86.

⁴⁴ Burg, *The Holocaust is Over*, 23-24.

⁴⁵ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall Israel and the World* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 192-99.

⁴⁶ Sohrab Sobhani, *The Pragmatic Entente: Israeli-Iranian Relations, 1948-1988* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 34.

⁴⁷ David Menashri, “Iran, Israel and the Middle East Conflict,” *Israel Affairs* 12, No.1 (2006), 109.

For Iran, developing stronger relations with Israel was a way to counter threats posed by the regimes in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen.⁴⁸ Besides, the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was concerned about the Soviet support for opposition groups in Iran. That's why he also tried to improve ties with the US, which was a close friend of Israel, for economic and military assistance.⁴⁹ Given these threat perceptions, and the need for the US support, the Shah felt that Iran's interests could best be aligned with Israel's periphery policy.⁵⁰ On the other hand, after the creation of Israel, Iran did not face the strategic or geopolitical concerns of the Arab states. It did not share a border with it and was not bothered by the influx of the Palestinian refugees. Moreover, until the 1960s, there were many Jews who had moved to Israel from Iran whose presence gave both states the opportunity for improving the relations.⁵¹ However, in order to avoid Arab countries' opposition, Iran wanted to keep its relations with Israel secret.⁵² In this regard, in 1958, the Shah negotiated upgrading the Israeli Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline with the Israeli leaders behind closed doors,⁵³ and Ben Gurion's groundbreaking visit to Iran in 1961 was kept from the public eye.⁵⁴

One of the most significant areas of cooperation between Israel and Iran was in security. Iraq at that time was viewed as a threat to both states. Thus both countries mutually pursued their interests regarding Iraq. For instance, during 1950s, Iran allowed thousands of Iraqi Jews to use Iran as a transit point on their way to Israel.⁵⁵ On the other hand, Israel sold large quantities of arms to Iran and trained Iran's military officers.⁵⁶ Each year over \$100 million worth of weapons were sold until the Revolution of 1979.⁵⁷ Besides, Israel's MOS-SAD and CIA jointly trained the secret police of Iran, the SAVAK.⁵⁸ Both states also cooperated in providing assistance to Iraqi Kurdish groups during 1960s and 1970s. Iran was worried about the Iraq's Baathist regime's hostility, and Israel viewed Iraq as an important threat.⁵⁹ For this reason, both of them had an interest in keeping Iraqi forces engaged in its northern territory to avo-

⁴⁸ Shaul Bakhash, "Iran's Relations with Israel, Syria, and Lebanon," From *The Iran at the Crossroads: Global Relations in a Turbulent Decade* (ed.) Miron Rezun, (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1990), 116.

⁴⁹ Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabih, *The Foreign Relations of Iran A Developing State in a Zone of Great Power Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 4.

⁵⁰ Sobhani, *The Pragmatic Entente*, 35.

⁵¹ Behrouz Souresrafi, *Khomeini and Israel* (England: I Researchers, 1988), 16.

⁵² Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 25-26.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁵ Sobhani, *The Pragmatic Entente*, 65.

⁵⁶ Ian Black and Benny Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Services* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 327.

⁵⁷ Aaron Klieman, *Israel's Global Reach* (New York: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1985), 158.

⁵⁸ Black and Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars*, 193.

⁵⁹ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 34-35.

id pressuring Iran to its southern border and Israel on its eastern.⁶⁰ Israel and Iran also cooperated economically prior to the Iranian Revolution. One of the most important dimensions of this relationship was oil trade. One year after the 1956 Suez Crisis, given both countries' mutual distrust of Egypt, and to lessen Iran's dependence on Egypt for oil exports, both countries financed and constructed the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline,⁶¹ which connected the Gulf of Aqaba to the Mediterranean, and enabled Iran to bypass the Suez Canal.

In the early days of the Revolution, Israel tried to maintain its relations with Iran. It tried to keep some personnel in Iran as long as possible, "hoping that their presence would compel the revolutionary government to maintain Iran's ties to Israel."⁶² However, as soon as Ayatollah Khomeini came to power, Israel's relations with Iran became null and void. This did not mean that Israel and Iran's interests completely diverged in the region. When Iran became involved in the war with Iraq in the 1980s, Israel sold weapons to Iran through indirect channels.⁶³ Because Iraq was an important threat to Israel's security, and by strengthening Iran's military, Israel hoped to weaken and distract Iraq.

As stated in the previous paragraphs, prior to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the two states were not hostile, and had an almost stable relationship. After the Revolution, the relations deteriorated and as of now, simply put, the current state of relations is one of extreme animosity and fear. This situation was further complicated by both Israeli and Iranian leaders' statements. Much of the Israeli approach to the Iranian nuclear program has derived from Ahmadinejad's rhetoric regarding Israel, Zionism, and the Holocaust. In 2005, Ahmadinejad delivered a speech in which he said that Israel should be "wiped off the map." For Israeli politicians and the general public, that statement was an evidence "of Iran's malign intent towards the Jewish state...Ahmadinejad's outburst underlined the importance of putting an end to Iran's nuclear ambitions."⁶⁴ Although the accuracy of the translation of that remark has been fundamentally questioned,⁶⁵ the remark has become the most frequently quoted statement with regard to the Iranian nuclear issue. Since then, it has been referred to by the majority of politicians and media around the world, who reacted offended or appalled.⁶⁶ It became a key statement of Israeli officials in addressing

⁶⁰ Sobhani, *The Pragmatic Entente*, 46.

⁶¹ Uri Bialer, "Fuel Bridge Across the Middle East Israel, Iran, and the Eilat-Ashkelon Oil Pipeline," *Israel Studies* 12, No.3 (2007), 34.

⁶² Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 80.

⁶³ Andrew Cockburn and Leslie Cockburn, *Dangerous Liaison: the Inside Story of the U.S.-Israeli Covert Relationship* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 393.

⁶⁴ Kasra Najji, *Ahmadinejad: the Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 140.

⁶⁵ Ethan Bronner, "Just How Far Did They Go, Those Words Against Israel?," *The New York Times*, 11 June 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/11/weekinreview/11bronner.html?_r=0 (Accessed: 22.10.2015).

⁶⁶ Alan Collins, *Contemporary Security Studies* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), 138.

the Iranian nuclear issue and in presenting it as a threat that must be taken seriously. At that time, Ehud Olmert, Interim Prime Minister of Israel, labeled Ahmadinejad a “psychopath” and made a direct comparison between the Iranian President and Adolph Hitler.⁶⁷ One of the statements of that kind was Ahmadinejad’s comment after the Israeli Gaza flotilla raid in June 2010. He said that “the devilish sound of the uncultured Zionists was coming out from their deceit...They were holding up the flag of the devil itself.”⁶⁸ He also drew connections between Israel and the supposed fabrication of the Holocaust. In a June 2009 speech he labeled Israel as “the most criminal regime in human history,” and also “called the Holocaust as a great deception.”⁶⁹ Three months later, he proclaimed that the Holocaust was “a lie” and “confrontation with Israel was a ‘national and religious duty.’”⁷⁰ On the other hand, in another occasion, he also addressed other Muslim states, declaring that any state that recognized Israel “should know that they will burn in the fire of the Muslim nation’s fury. The Islamic nation cannot allow its historical enemy to live in the heart of the Islamic world and have its security guaranteed.”⁷¹

Given the experiences of the history of the Jewish people and Israel, and the memory of the Holocaust, the concepts of national security and existential threat are two important issues in Israeli politics. The case of the bombing of the Osiraq and the debate about Iranian nuclear capability demonstrate two instances where Israel’s foreign policy has been heavily informed by these concepts.⁷² Statements made by Ahmadinejad only made it clear why Israeli officials have been so worried about Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. As one of the prominent security experts of Israel, Efraim Inbar stated that “for Israel, a nuclear Iran constitutes an existential threat. The tripartite combination of a radical Islamic regime, long-range missile capability and nuclear weapons is extremely perilous.”⁷³ In light of these concerns, in May 2006, in a speech he delivered in the US Congress, Israel’s Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told that Iran’s nuclear capability would mean “mass destruction of innocent human life” and for Israel this would constitute “an existential threat.”⁷⁴ This

⁶⁷ Hilary Leila Krieger, “Olmert: Ahmadinejad is a Psychopath,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 30 April 2006, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Olmert-Ahmedinejad-is-a-psychopath> (Accessed: 22.10.2015).

⁶⁸ “Iran’s Ahmadinejad Slams Israel, Proposed Sanctions,” *CNN*, 8 June 2010, www.edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/06/08/iran.ahmadinejad.security.summit/ (Accessed: 22.10.2015).

⁶⁹ “Ahmadinejad Calls Holocaust ‘Great Deception’,” *Reuters*, 3 June 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5525W320090603> (Accessed: 22.10.2015).

⁷⁰ Robert F. Worth, “Despite Warning, Thousands Rally in Iran,” *The New York Times*, 18 September 2009, http://www.mobile.nytimes.com/2009/09/19/world/middleeast/19iran.html?referrer=&_r=0 (Accessed: 22.12.2015).

⁷¹ Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, 147.

⁷² Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 339.

⁷³ Inbar, *Israel’s National Security Issues*, 214.

⁷⁴ Hana L. Julian, “News Analysis: Iranian Nuclear Threat Growing,” *Arutz Sheva Israel National News*, 25 August 2006, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/110783> (Accessed: 22.12.2015).

statement is a reflection of a longheld high-threat perception of a large part of Israel's strategic community. On the other hand, in December 2005, then the Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stressed that Israel "cannot accept a nuclear Iran," and told that Israel "has the ability to deal with this."⁷⁵ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also views Iran as an existential threat, even calling Ahmadinejad "a modern Hitler" in 2008. In an interview in the previous year, he also warned of a situation in which Israel has "failed and Iran has succeeded in acquiring a bomb," and stated that "against lunatics, deterrence must be absolute, total. The lunatics must understand that if they raise their hand against us, we will hit them in a way that will eviscerate any desire to harm us."⁷⁶

3. SECURITIZATION OF IRAN AND ISRAEL'S IRAN POLICY

Securitization is the theory developed by scholars from the Copenhagen School, which argues that security is deeply related to the politicization of an issue.⁷⁷ In this regard, security politics is both about underlining existing threats, and a performative activity making certain issues visible as a threat. On the other hand, threats and security are not objective matters; rather "security is a practice, a specific way of framing an issue. Within this context, security is a concept about how someone designates something as a threat, and security discourse is characterized by dramatizing an issue as having absolute priority. Something is presented as an absolute threat."⁷⁸ A security issue is defined as it is "posited as a threat to the survival of some referent object, which is claimed to have a right to survive."⁷⁹ According to this theory, when a state feels that its very existence is threatened, it may claim the right to enact extraordinary measures to ensure its survival. In this regard, securitization is

"the discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat."⁸⁰

In other words, securitization is a speech-act through which a securitizing actor identifies something as an existential threat, and calls for extraordinary

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ronen Bergman, "Letter from Tel Aviv: Netanyahu's Iranian Dilemma," *Foreign Affairs*, 10 June 2009, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2009-06-10/letter-tel-aviv-netanyahu-iranian-dilemma> (Accessed: 23.12.2015).

⁷⁷ Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap De Wilde, *Security A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 23.

⁷⁸ Ole Wæver, "European Security Identities," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 34, No.1 (1996), 108.

⁷⁹ Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 491.

measures (emergency politics) to deal with it.⁸¹ By presenting an issue as an existential threat, he wants to say that: “If we do not tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant (because we will not be here or will not be free to deal with it in our own way).”⁸² In this regard, securitization is a process which has three elements: the securitizing actor, the speech-act and the audience.⁸³ In this context, a securitizing actor is “someone, or a group, who performs the security speech-act. Common players in this role are political leaders, bureaucracies, governments, lobbyists.”⁸⁴ It is the actor who decides whether something constitutes as an existential threat, and being in “a position of authority” is the main condition to be a securitizing actor.⁸⁵

In a securitization process, the securitizing actor initiates the speech-act, and tries to convince an audience. The threat is used to legitimize the political action. He tells that a referent object faces existential danger from a designated threat, and thereby claims the “right to handle the issue through extraordinary means.”⁸⁶ In this context there are two steps in a securitization process. First is to portray a particular issue, person, or entity to be an existential threat. Second is to convince the relevant audience. These steps are carried out by a speech-act, which is the language to articulate the issue in security terms.⁸⁷ If the audience is convinced, then it gives the securitizing actor the legitimacy to act in a way that would be normally not acceptable under international norms. For this reason, in the securitization process, presenting an issue as an existential threat requires a move from normal politics to emergency politics. Thus, the claim about existential threats leads to the legitimization and use of extraordinary measures. In the case of the Iranian nuclear program, Israeli leaders are the securitizing actors, and their audience is both the Israeli public and international community. Those leaders have tried to securitize the Iranian nuclear program by drawing upon the Jewish people’s collective memory of the Holocaust.

The securitization of Iran by Israeli leaders touches upon the instrumental use of the Holocaust as a form of societal trauma. As Fierke points out, “an experience of societal trauma...made it possible to weave a coherent collective identity in political discourse which paved the way for a projection of military force. The result was a regional and international security dilemma.”⁸⁸ Specifically for the Holocaust, the construction of a direct link between Israel’s enemies and the Nazis

⁸¹ Buzan et al., *Security A New Framework*, 21.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸³ Holger Stritzel, “Towards a Theory of Securitization: Copenhagen and Beyond,” *European Journal of International Relations* 13, No.3 (2007), 362.

⁸⁴ Buzan et al., *Security A New Framework*, 40.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁷ Collins, *Contemporary Security Studies*, 112.

⁸⁸ Karin Fierke, *Critical Approaches to International Security* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 134.

“established the basis for articulating an existential threat to Israeli identity...The dangers confronting Israel remained essentially Nazi dangers and any military threat to Israel would mean a new Holocaust... This trauma had had a central place in the collective memory of Israel and it has been repeatedly invoked by Israeli leaders to justify particular acts vis-à-vis the Arab world and Palestinian population.”⁸⁹

Israeli leaders have consistently tried to securitize Iran by telling the Israeli public and other countries that Iran’s nuclear program constitutes an existential threat for Israel. They seem to be haunted by the specter of catastrophic destruction associated with Iran’s nuclear program. For this reason, there have been many Israeli leaders across the political spectrum who have emphasized the grave danger posed by Iran. Shimon Peres is one of them and a highly symbolic example. He was one of the officials in 1981 to dissuade Begin from striking Iraq.⁹⁰ However, even he declared about Iran in 2005 that it is “the most dangerous country around, because the mullahs believe their religion is superior, not unlike Hitler believing the Aryan race superior.”⁹¹ Peres has also said in the Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2013 that

“the civilized world must ask itself how in such a short space of time after the crematoria were extinguished, after the terrible death toll that the allied powers endured to put an end to the Nazi devil, it is still possible for the leadership, like that of Iran, to openly deny the Holocaust and threaten another Holocaust.”⁹²

No other Israeli leader, however, has treated Iran in Holocaust terms more than Israel’s current Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. As Begin treated Iraq in 1981, Netanyahu is concerned with Iran in the same way with the Holocaust rhetoric. By invoking imagery of the Holocaust, he has been able to successfully securitize the Iranian nuclear program in the eyes of the Israeli public, as well as the international community to a lesser extent. In this context, Netanyahu’s speech to the UN General Assembly in 2009 was a particularly significant example. Its connections between the World War II and Iran indicate the lasting dominance of the Holocaust analogy in Israeli consciousness:

“The United Nations was founded after the carnage of World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust. It was charged with preventing the recurrence of such horrendous events...Yesterday, the President of Iran stood at this very podium, spewing his latest anti-Semitic rants...The

⁸⁹ Ibid., 133.

⁹⁰ Yitzhak Shamir, “The Failure of Diplomacy,” From *The Israel’s Strike Against the Iraqi Nuclear Reactor 7 June, 1981*, (Jerusalem: Menachem Begin Heritage Center, 2003), 15.

⁹¹ “Iran Poses Dangerous Threat, Peres Tells ADL,” *Anti-Defamation League*, 9 May 2005, <http://www.archive.adl.org/nr/exeres/d56db937-daf7-402a-a26c-880bce2d8b03,0b1623ca-d5a4-465d-a369-df6e8679cd9e,frameless.html> (Accessed: 27.12.2015).

⁹² “Text of Peres’s Holocaust Remembrance Day Speech,” *The Times of Israel*, 7 April 2013, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/text-of-peres-holocaust-remembrance-day-speech/> (Accessed: 23.12.2015).

man who calls the Holocaust a lie spoke from this podium...A mere six decades after the Holocaust, you give legitimacy to a man who denies that the murder of six million Jews took place and pledges to wipe out the Jewish state.”⁹³

In order to successfully securitize the Iranian nuclear program, Netanyahu invoked in his speech the Holocaust imagery. Moreover, as he continues the speech, the danger posed by Iran, similar to that posed by the Nazis, becomes even graver both for the Jews and for the world as a whole, with the possibility of an Iranian nuclear weapon:

“If the most primitive fanaticism can acquire the most deadly weapons, the march of history could be reversed for a time. And like the belated victory over the Nazis, the forces of progress and freedom will prevail only after a horrific toll of blood and fortune has been exacted from mankind. This is why the greatest threat facing the world today is the marriage between religious fundamentalism and the weapons of mass destruction. The most urgent challenge facing this body today is to prevent the tyrants of Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons...The forces of terror led by Iran seek to destroy peace, eliminate Israel and overthrow the world order.”⁹⁴

Netanyahu labelled the Iranian nuclear program a threat to Israel's security to the highest degree, and talked again about the same topic at the UN General Assembly two years later, in 2011. In this instance, due to his perception of the Iranian nuclear program as an existential threat to Israel, he stressed that action must be taken to prevent this from happening:

“Can you imagine that man (Ahmadinejad) who ranted here yesterday...armed with nuclear weapons? The international community must stop Iran before it's too late...But as the prime minister of Israel, I cannot risk the future of the Jewish state on wishful thinking.”⁹⁵

In a speech for Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2012, he again pointed that “a nuclear armed Iran is an existential threat to the State of Israel.”⁹⁶ The content of these speeches show the securitization of Iran. By this way Netanyahu justifies himself when he makes threats to use extreme actions, and legitimizes the possible use of extraordinary measures, such as a preventative/preemptive

⁹³ Benjamin Netanyahu, “General Debate of the 64th Session (2009) Statement by H.E. Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu,” *The United Nations*, 24 September 2009, <http://www.un.org/ga/64/generaldebate/IL.shtml> (Accessed: 23.12.2015).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Benjamin Netanyahu, “66th Session Statement by H.E. Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu,” *The United Nations*, 23 September 2011, <http://www.gadebate.un.org/66/israel> (Accessed: 23.12.2015).

⁹⁶ “Text of Netanyahu's Holocaust Remembrance Day Speech,” *The Times of Israel*, 18 April 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/text-of-netanyahus-holocaust-remembrance-day-speech/> (Accessed: 23.12.2015).

strike on Iranian nuclear facilities, as Begin did in 1981 in Iraq. In this context, at the UN General Assembly meeting in 2012, he stated that “at this late hour, there was one way to peacefully prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, and that was to ‘place a clear red line’ on its nuclear program.”⁹⁷ He clarified this threat at the UN General Assembly meeting when he stated in that Israel “would have no choice but to defend itself against such a threat. If forced to stand alone, then it would do so.”⁹⁸ This would mean a preemptive strike (military attack) against Iran, which would constitute the breaking of international law, and which would also constitute taking politics outside the normal rules.

Even though current government in Israel and especially Netanyahu views Iran as an existential threat, there has been important debate among prominent Israeli political and security figures regarding Netanyahu’s approach toward Iran. One of them was Ehud Barak, the former Israeli Prime Minister, who stated in 2010 that “right now Iran does not pose an existential threat to Israel,” adding that “if Iran becomes nuclear, it will spark an arms race in the Middle East.”⁹⁹ On the other hand, Gadi Eisenkot, the incumbent Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defence Forces, has “opposed Israeli military intervention to thwart Iran’s nuclear program unless Iran poses an immediate existential threat to Israel.”¹⁰⁰ Besides some politicians and soldiers, ex-heads of intelligence agencies of the MOSSAD and Shin Bet have also controversial views on Iran’s nuclear program. For instance, Meir Dagan, former MOSSAD Chief, stated in 2011 that “a strike on Iran was ‘far from being Israel’s preferred option’.” According to him, there were more effective “tools and methods” to deal with Iran.¹⁰¹ Dagan has been a critic of Netanyahu’s approach to Iran, and he clearly pointed his opposition to a military attack on Iranian nuclear facilities. He also reiterated his views in 2015, and told that “the person that has caused Israel the most strategic damage when it comes to the Iranian issue is the prime minister.”¹⁰² On the other hand, with respect to Iran’s capabilities, another ex-MOSSAD Chief, Ephraim Halevy stressed that Iran was “far from posing an existential threat to Israel.” For him, “the growing Haredi radicalization” po-

⁹⁷ Benjamin Netanyahu, “67th Session Statement Summary by Benjamin Netanyahu,” *The United Nations*, 27 September 2012, <http://www.gadebate.un.org/67/israel> (Accessed: 23.12.2015).

⁹⁸ Benjamin Netanyahu, “68th Session Statement Summary by Benjamin Netanyahu,” *The United Nations*, 1 October 2013, <http://www.gadebate.un.org/68/israel> (Accessed: 23.12.2015).

⁹⁹ “Barak: Iran Poses No Immediate Existential Threat to Israel,” *Haaretz*, 19 April 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/barak-iran-poses-no-immediate-existential-threat-to-israel-1.284529> (Accessed: 23.12.2015).

¹⁰⁰ “Israel’s Next Army Chief ‘Would Only Strike Iran As Last Resort,’” *The Times of Israel*, 28 November 2014, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-next-army-chief-would-only-strike-iran-as-last-resort/> (Accessed: 23.12.2015).

¹⁰¹ Amos Harel, “Former Mossad Chief: Iran far from Achieving Nuclear Bomb,” *Haaretz*, 10 April 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defence/former-mossad-chief-iran-far-from-achieving-nuclear-bomb-1.388090> (Accessed: 3.11.2015).

¹⁰² Nahum Barnea and Shimon Shiffer, “Netanyahu Has Caused Israel the Most Strategic Damage on Iran,” *Ynetnews*, 27 February 2015, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4631634,00.html> (Accessed: 3.11.2015).

sed greater risk for Israel than Ahmedinejad.¹⁰³ Dagan's criticisms have been echoed by Yuval Diskin, former head of the Shin Bet. He compared Netanyahu to Begin, and stated that

“Netanyahu is possessed by Menachem Begin, who attacked Iraq's nuclear reactor, and by Olmert, who many claim is responsible for the attack on Syria's reactor. Bibi (Netanyahu) wants to go down in history as the person who did something on this size and scale. I have heard him belittle what his predecessors have done and assert that his mission on Iran is on a much grander scale.”¹⁰⁴

What these people have challenged have been Netanyahu's threat assessments, and his handling of the issue. They have shared Netanyahu's concerns, and as Dagan told “a nuclear Iran is a reality that Israel won't be able to come to terms with.” Dagan have also agreed with Netanyahu that “a nuclear-armed Iran poses an existential threat to the State of Israel.”¹⁰⁵ However they have claimed that Iran does not have the capabilities to produce a nuclear weapon in the near future, and claimed that there have been different methods in dealing with Iran, instead of a preemptive strike.

The above remarks from Israeli political and security community people are clear examples of the debate about what constitutes an existential threat for Israel, what Israel's policy should be towards Iran, and what Iran's position is in this argument. It is clear that the incumbent Prime Minister Netanyahu accepts Iran as an existential threat for Israel. For this reason, he has tried to securitize the issue to be able to do everything in his power in order to stop Iran's nuclear program, and he has succeeded in securitizing Iran through the use of numerous speech-acts and analogies to the Holocaust. His views have been accepted strongly by many Jews, both at home and abroad. This brings the question of what might happen in future, especially after the deal signed with Iran in July 2015.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND WHAT'S AHEAD?

The Jewish people have a strong feeling of insecurity due to their history full of threats to their existence, and the Holocaust has been an important trauma in the collective memory of them. With a history of the Jews full of atrocities which culminated in the Holocaust, Israel's foreign policy has been vividly affected by national traumas. That influence has been seen in the collective de-

¹⁰³ Yoav Zitun, “Iran far from Posing Existential Threat,” *Ynetnews*, 11 April 2011, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4143909,00.html> (Accessed: 3.11.2015).

¹⁰⁴ “Diskin: Netanyahu Unreliable, ‘Possessed’ by Iran,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 1 January 2013, <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Diskin-Netanyahu-unreliable-possessed-by-Iran> (Accessed: 3.11.2015).

¹⁰⁵ Barnea and Shiffer, “Netanyahu Has Caused Israel the Most Strategic Damage on Iran.”

cision-making processes or decision-makers' choices.¹⁰⁶ The collective historical memories, and above all, of the Holocaust have induced the Jewish people to fear attacks, particularly if executed with chemical or nuclear warheads. The fear that the Jewish people could again face an annihilation attempt has haunted the Israeli public and especially the leaders, and those leaders determined the security and foreign policy of Israel by focusing on the existential threat perception.

As understood from their cooperation prior to 1979, it is clear that Israel and Iran are not primordial enemies. Israel even cooperated with Iran during the 1980s to sell weapons. This was an indication of both countries' pragmatism. Keeping in mind that there are many other factors that can influence international relations, the current situation shows the importance and effect of domestic factors (like Holocaust) on foreign relations of both Israel and Iran. However, the current status of Israel-Iran relations seems to remain contentious as long as both sides continue to pursue their current different policy options. But this does not have to remain forever. There might be changes that could take place in the future, such as the empowerment of moderates in the governments of both Iran and Israel. In that case, both countries can engage in policies that could significantly and positively affect bilateral relations.

The primacy of security in Israeli foreign policy is not only a result of the threats Israel has faced, but also a result of the insecurity felt because of the Jewish people's collective historical memories, and above all, of the Holocaust. The anxieties and fears of Israeli politicians and the Israeli public at large are inexplicable without reference to Jewish historical memories, and especially the traumatic collective memory of the Holocaust. For this reason, Israel should be given the assurances that Iran would not possess nuclear weapons, which might in future have the potential of causing a second "Holocaust." On the other hand, Iran has the right of pursuing a nuclear program for peaceful purposes, and Israel should respect that right.

Securitization of an issue starts with the securitizing actors' understanding of the threats perceived. It is a meaning creation and "the meanings which objects, events and actions have for states" are necessarily "the meanings they have for those individuals who act in the name of the state."¹⁰⁷ Therefore, leaders' perception of threat is an important issue, because "policy makers also function within a discursive space that imposes meanings on their world and thus creates reality."¹⁰⁸ As the discursive practices of securitizing actors are often the expressions of how they linguistically construct reality, then, greater

¹⁰⁶ Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 229-47.

¹⁰⁷ Jutta Weldes, "Constructing National Interest," *European Journal of International Relations* 2, No.3 (1996), 280.

¹⁰⁸ Roxanne Lynn Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines," *International Studies Quarterly* 37, No.3 (1993), 303.

attention must be paid to how these people define an existential threat. This creation of the reality is usually a subjective move, and it is affected by how the individual decision makers perceive the world, and in the Israeli case, how they have been affected by the historical memories of the Jewish people. In this regard, what makes Iran's nuclear activities an existential threat for Israeli leaders is the collective narratives of the past and the probability of a second Holocaust. Therefore, for the securitization of Iran, the securitizing actor and the collective memory of the Holocaust are important. The securitization of Iran starts with trying to convince Israeli public of a nuclear threat (a second Holocaust), which in this case is Iran's nuclear program. In this context, Israeli leaders have consistently tried to do portray Iran's nuclear activities as an existential threat according to their threat perception which the Holocaust has affected significantly. Unless a socio-cultural transformation takes place in Israel and the effect of collective memories and narratives lessens, then it is evident that the emphasis on the Holocaust while dealing with Iran's nuclear issue will not vanish. Even though a new generation of leaders is emerging in Israel, the knowledge of the Jewish collective narratives, memories, and beliefs which pass from their predecessors significantly affect their world view and threat perception. Then it is almost impossible to publicly criticize the use of the memory of the Holocaust for Iran's nuclear activities, or to suggest that Iran's nuclear program be taken out of the sphere of security (from emergency to normal politics).

The move of taking an issue from emergency to normal politics by the political actors is called desecuritization. It is defined simply as "the moving of an issue out of the sphere of security."¹⁰⁹ Currently, in Netanyahu's Likud Party-led coalition government, there are 4 other political parties. These are Kulanu, the Jewish Home, Shas and United Torah Judaism.¹¹⁰ The coalition's composition shows that it is one of the most right-wing administrations in Israel's history. It controls 61 parliamentary seats, and is a right-wing and ultra-Orthodox government with the narrowest of Knesset majorities. This government is a coalition of Likud with its "natural partners," that is with right-wing and ultra-Orthodox parties. Netanyahu's position is well known about Iran's nuclear program, and during his previous years in the office, there were no substantial improvements for desecuritization. At the same time, it seems that this coalition shares common ground in terms of making the defence and preservation of the Israeli state its utmost priority. It just so happens that Netanyahu's position on this issue coincides with the other parties in the coalition. In light of all this information, it seems that Netanyahu's approach would be a continuation of the policies adopted previously. Under these circumstances, the desecuritization of Iran seems impossible, and a shift in policy regarding the Iranian nuclear program from its current hardline stance would prove to be very difficult.

¹⁰⁹ Lene Hansen, "Reconstructing Desecuritization: the Normative-Political in the Copenhagen School and Directions for How to Apply It," *Review of International Studies* 38, No.3 (2012), 525-30.

¹¹⁰ "With Less Than 2 Hours to Spare, Netanyahu Secures a Coalition," *The Times of Israel*, 6 May 2015, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/in-the-11th-hour-netanyahu-finalizes-61-strong-coalition/> (Accessed: 23.12.2015).

On the other hand, as stated earlier, a deal was reached with Iran in July 2015 about its nuclear program. The deal welcomed by some world leaders. However, Israeli leaders condemned the agreement, and claimed that it would “free Iran to pursue nuclear weapons.”¹¹¹ After the deal was announced, Netanyahu called the deal “a historic mistake,” and told that “the deal with Iran poses grave threats to Israel and the Middle East, to Europe and the world.” Even though Netanyahu has many times in the past mentioned the preemptive strike as an option to stop Iran’s nuclear endeavours, during the meeting with the US Defence Secretary Ash Carter, he did not raise the possibility of a unilateral military strike.¹¹² In this regard, Uzi Rabi, the director of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African History at Tel Aviv University, stated that “it goes without saying that an agreement prevents Israel from thinking about a military option, unlike the options that might have existed five or 10 years ago.” Besides, Yoel Guzansky, former head of the Iran desk at Israel’s National Security Council, said that “the only thing Netanyahu has left is to continue talking.”¹¹³

It seems that, for now, even though Iran and its nuclear activities will be a securitized issue in Israel, it is highly unlikely that Israel would act unilaterally with a preemptive strike. If Israel makes such a move, it would face serious condemnation, with the risk of isolation from international community. On the other hand, Iran does not seem that it would risk undermining the deal by violating its conditions. Otherwise, it would lose the oil revenue it plans to get for its economy. In this case, it is in both countries’ interest that they should seek ways to compromise at least on nuclear issue. It is not probable that they will reach a solution on other problem areas between both countries, such as Iran’s support to organizations which Israel views as important threats to its security. However, at least Iran could accept Israel’s right to exist and Israel might tolerate the nuclear program of Iran for peaceful purposes.

¹¹¹ “Reactions to the Deal on Iran’s Nuclear Program,” *The New York Times*, 14 July 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/live/iran-nuclear-deal-live-updates/> (Accessed: 23.12.2015).

¹¹² Adam Entous, “In Jerusalem, Israel’s Leader Confronts U.S. on Nuclear Deal,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 21 July 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/israels-benjamin-netanyahu-protests-iran-deal-to-u-s-defense-secretary-ash-carter-1437495724> (Accessed: 23.12.2015).

¹¹³ Booth and Eglash, “Israeli Leaders Condemn Iran Deal.”

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