Bachelor’s Thesis

“Let this be a warning: If you attack Israel, we will defend ourselves”

Assessing defensive and offensive realism as applied upon the Israeli conduct against Iran 2007-2020

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Abstract

In this theory testing case study the aim is to test which of the two competing theories, defensive and offensive realism, possess the greater explanatory power in regards to the Israeli action against Iran between 2007-2020, while subsequently assessing if either theory is applicable. Two competing analytical models, based around the seminal works of Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt, and John J. Mearsheimer, will be applied upon the Israeli actions against the Iranian nuclear program and the Israeli actions against Iran in Syria. The essay utilizes a wide array of sources, from news articles to academic papers, in order to provide a correct description of the events of study. This aim was conceptualized by posing a research question, followed by four competing hypotheses. These will, in conjunction with the analytical models, enable a comparison of the explanatory power the theories possess when applied upon the Israeli conduct against Iran. It is concluded in this paper that defensive realism possesses greater explanatory power when applied upon the Israeli conduct against Iran, compared with offensive realism.

Keywords:
Israel, Iran, Syria, defensive realism, offensive realism, Waltz, Walt, Mearsheimer
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1. Introduction

1.1. Presentation

On the 27th of November 2020 Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, considered to be Iran's top nuclear scientist leading their aspirations for nuclear weapons (Fitzpatrick, 2006, p.530; Dahl, 2011; Bergman, 2018, p.608; Fassihi, Sanger E., Schmitt & Bergman, 2020), was assassinated in an attack attributed to Israel (Fassihi, Sanger E., Schmitt & Bergman, 2020). This most recent assassination is merely one attack in a coherent and deliberate strategy by Israel, targeting the Iranian nuclear program in order to prohibit Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons (Butler, 2010a; 2010b; Bahgat, 2018, p.67; Bergman, 2018, pp.578-580, 607-609). The relationship between Israel and Iran has been intricate and complex since the state of Israel was founded, shifting from the friendlier relations and alliance during the rule of the Iranian shah (Parsi, 2007, pp.22-28; Thomas, 2007, p.169; Bergman, 2018, pp.362-363, 365), evolving into an evermore tempestuous relationship since the Iranian revolution of 1979 (Parsi, 2007, pp.79-86; Bergman, 2018, pp.367-368). In his speech during the international Quds1 day the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, labeled the state of Israel as a “deadly, cancerous growth and a detriment to this region”, further describing it as a “long-lasting virus” that “will not last much longer” (Khamenei, 2020), whereas another high ranking Iranian state official declared “the Zionist regime will perish according to God’s promise” (TeheranTimes, 2020). The conflict has further escalated in light of the Abraham Accords, which are the peace treaties Israel reached with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, as well as the normalized relations and treaty with Sudan (White House, 2020a; 2020b). As recently as November 18th 2020 Israel attacked Iranian and Syrian military targets in Syria, in what should be seen as merely a

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1 Al-Quds is the arabic word for Jerusalem
continuation of the conflict between Israel and Iran (Heller & Al-Khalidi, 2020). Prime minister Netanyahu described the Israeli attitude towards Iran in the following sentiment “The tyrants of Tehran deserve no free passes” (IsraeliPM, 2020), while the Israeli defense force’s published the operational footage from the November 18th attack followed by the statement, “Let this be a warning: If you attack Israel, we will defend ourselves” (IDF, 2020).

This essay will take the form of a theory testing case study, centered around the purpose of testing the theories of defensive and offensive realism. The aim is to assess which of the competing theories are most applicable, and thus holds explanatory value, when analysing Israeli actions against Iran. From this, a subsequent research question will be erected to be utilized to assess which, if any, of the theories will be more applicable to understand the actions taken by Israel. Lastly, competing hypotheses will be erected regarding which of the theories, if any, are most applicable upon the Israeli conduct following the empirical analysis.

To fulfil this aim a delimited timeframe has been created, from which two cases have been chosen to serve as the base for the subsequent analysis. The study will be delimited to the period of 2007-2020, with 2007 being the starting point for Israel's comprehensive strategy to deter and destabilize the Iranian nuclear program, in the form of a covert2 assassination of an Iranian scientist (Bergman, 2018, p.608), this being the first of the two cases that will be studied. The second case concerns Israeli actions against Iranian entrenchment in Syria (Bahgat, 2018, pp.67-68, 75; Heller & Al-Khalidi, 2020).

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2 Department of defense defines an covert operation as, “An operation that is so planned and executed as to conceal the identity of or permit plausible denial by the sponsor” https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf
1.2. Relevancy of the research subject

The relevance of the subject can be found in its concurrency, with the Iranian reaction towards the Abraham Accords (See: Khamenei.ir, 2020; Times of Israel, 2020; Iran primer, 2020), the recent assassination of a leading Iranian nuclear scientist (Fassihi, Sanger E., Schmitt & Bergman, 2020), and the ongoing hostilities in Syria, involving both Israeli and Iranian forces (Bahgat, 2018, pp.67-68, 75; Heller & Al-Khalidi, 2020), as cases that indicate that this is a ongoing conflict. In a general sense, beyond the fields of political science and international relations, the essay will highlight how controversial actions can be rationalised by the states that perform them. Lastly, it will provide further knowledge regarding the contemporary and contemptuous conflict between Iran and Israel.

The subject is considered relevant for political science as it will contribute with an aspect of theory testing, by testing the two competing theories defensive and offensive realism, in regards to Iran and Israel’s contemptuous relationship, by examining how the theories explain the Israeli conduct. Although there are vast amounts of academic works concerning the relationship between Iran and Israel (See: Parsi, 2007; Jones, 2018; Bahgat, 2018), and Israel's foreign policy in general (See: Jones, 2018; Ben Aharon, 2018; Aran & Fleischmann, 2018), a theory testing aspect is lacking, and it is this which this essay aims to provide. By applying these two influential IR\textsuperscript{3} theories, a categorization of Israeli conduct will be possible, thus contributing with filling this scientific gap. The theories will provide possible explanations concerning the motives, strategies, and causal mechanisms, that are behind the actions taken by Israel. Studying these cases are of paramount interest from an IR perspective, since they are principal problems researchers deal within international relations. They are contemporary, highly active, and

\textsuperscript{3} Abbreviation for “International relations”
intricate, they can thus serve as critical cases to highlight why states act in certain ways. It is only by the use of theories that scholars can provide cumulative and general knowledge as to why states act in certain ways, and thus derive and formulate general rules regarding state behaviour. Which theories the researcher chooses to utilize or test is of secondary importance as long as the chosen theories are thoroughly motivated, and relevant for the cases of study.

These factors in conjunction with each other render the essay relevant both from a politically scientific perspective, as well as from a more general point of view (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Towns & Wågnerud. 2017, pp.32-33).

1.3. Research question and hypotheses

The research question will permeate the essay by assessing which of the two theories, defensive and offensive realism, possess the greater explanatory power in regards to the Israeli conduct against Iran. The tenets, and their appurtenant indicators, will be further presented in the theoretical part. They are based on the works of Kenneth Waltz and Stephen Walt for defensive realism, and from John J. Mearsheimer for offensive realism. From these theoretical works two competing analytical models, consisting of tenets and empirical indicators, will be erected and permeate the empirical analysis in order to derive conclusions regarding the explanatory power of the competing theories. From this research question four hypotheses, H1-H4, have been erected through deductive reasoning, deriving them from the aforementioned theories. These hypotheses will serve to illustrate the possible outcomes from the empirical analysis. Finally, a conclusive discussion will be held in which the research question will be answered, and subsequently which one of the hypotheses that was found to be correct.
Research question:
1. Which of the theories explains the Israeli conduct against Iran better?

Hypotheses:
H1: Defensive realism possesses greater explanatory power in regards to the Israeli actions, and conduct.
H2: Offensive realism possesses greater explanatory power in regards to the Israeli actions, and conduct.
H3: The theories possess equal explanatory value in regard to the Israeli actions, and conduct.
H4: Neither theory can explain the Israeli actions, and conduct.

1.4. Previous research

Previous research that has utilized and tested theories in order to understand Israeli foreign policy, are scant. However, there exists considerable research describing the intricacies of the Israeli-Iranian relationship, as well as Israeli foreign operations in general. Two designated books have been chosen to highlight this, Trita Parsi’s book will highlight how the Israeli-Iranian relationship has developed and its intricacies, while Ronen Bergman will serve to highlight Israeli operations with a particular focus on the covert side and their operations against the Iranian nuclear program. Unfortunately, there does not currently exist a likewise comprehensive book focused on how Syria has developed into a new military frontier between Iran and Israel. To successfully circumvent this problem the essay will instead opt to utilize several different scientific articles and reports, the most important of them will be briefly presented.
1.4.1. Trita Parsi: “Treacherous Alliance: The secret dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.”.

Trita Parsi is a prominent academic scholar specialised on Iran and Iranian politics. In this book Parsi describes the intricacies and the different turns the relationship between Israel, Iran, and America has taken since the rule of the Iranian Shah. His description of their relationship is widely accepted and which he corroborates by interviews with state officials from all three countries, whilst also providing details about different operations and policy decisions that validate his descriptions. Although Parsi’s book is from 2007 this will not affect its utility, the book will serve to describe how the Israeli-Iranian relationship looked prior to the revolution, and subsequently how it has changed since the revolution. The essay will contribute by putting the knowledge Parsi provides in a theoretical context, and by expanding the research regarding their contemporary relationship to include events post-2007.

Parsi explains the different strategies that primarily Israel and Iran have utilized against each other, from the friendly relations during the rule of the Iranian Shah as part of the Israeli “periphery doctrine” (Parsi, 2007, pp.19-28), to the hostility stemming from the Iranian revolution (Parsi, 2007, pp.79-86). Furthermore, Parsi shows instances where both countries disregarded their hostility towards each other by secretly cooperating in order to attain strategic goals and with Israel hoping to rebuild their relationship. This was evident by the contacts between Tel Aviv and Tehran during the 1980s’, with the Iran-contra affair being the most extensive operation, wherein Israel and America supplied Iran with weapons in their war against Iraq (Parsi, 2007, pp.110-129). During the 1990s Benjamin Netanyahu lowered the Israeli rhetoric against Iran, while also attempting to alleviate the tensions with Iran in the hopes of, among other strategic aims, rebuilding the relationship with Iran and
shifting focus onto the Palestinians instead of Iran (Parsi, 2007, pp.196-201).

1.4.2. Ronen Bergman: “Rise And Kill First - The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations”.
Ronen Bergman provides an in depth and detailed account of how Israel utilizes targeted assassinations as a deliberate strategy to destabilize their enemies, and eliminate key figures for these countries and groups. He utilizes interviews with former state officials, as well as interviews with former agents with insight into different Israeli operations. Furthermore, he highlights how Israel generally, and with few exceptions, avoids to either comment or confirm their involvement in these kinds of operations (Bergman, 2018, pp.xiii-xv). His descriptions of these events are widely accepted and corroborated by a vast amount of independent academic research. This book will be utilized to describe the Israeli actions against the Iranian nuclear program, subsequently this essay will contribute by applying these descriptions within a theory testing context and broader Israeli conduct towards Iran. Since the book is from 2018 there have been incidents that have happened since, despite this the book is still applicable. The continued actions rather reinforces the picture Bergman provides, ascertaining the Israeli strategy against Iran as consistent.

Of essentiality for this essay is his detailed description of the targeted assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists and Operation Olympic Games, which was a coordinated cyberattack against nuclear facilities, as part of the Israeli strategy to hinder Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Israel has been responsible for at least five or six assassinations of Iranian scientists, starting with the assassination of Ardeshir Hosseinpour in 2007 (Bergman, 2018, pp.576-580, 607-609). Operation Olympic Games were an extensive cyberattack in 2009 jointly developed and carried out by the
U.S. and Israel, targeting the Iranian nuclear project (Bergman, 2018, pp.607-608).

1.4.3. Articles and Reports regarding Israeli policy in Syria
To circumvent the lack of a comprehensive book regarding Israeli policy against Iran in Syria the essay will utilize various articles and reports. These will primarily come from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies. These are two leading research institutes specialised on the Middle East, with some of the articles being written by former IDF personnel and decision makers, such as Gadi Eisenkot the former director of the IDF, giving them increased relevance and credibility. Furthermore, there is an advantage in that they are contemporary and by their multitude, which made it possible to choose articles focused on specific events and decisions of interest.

These articles and reports will be utilized to describe the Israeli doctrine implemented in Syria (See: Brun, 2019; Eisenkot & Siboni, 2019), whilst simultaneously giving strategic and operational details and insights for the Israeli actions in Syria (See: Nadimi, 2018a; 2018b; Even, 2019; Herzog, 2019). Their descriptions of key events are widely accepted and corroborated by the various news articles the essay utilizes. Furthermore, the essay will contribute by utilizing these descriptions in a broader theory testing context, that will subsequently enable a classification of the Israeli conduct against Iran in accordance with two influential IR theories.
2. Theory

In the following passage the theoretical framework for defensive realism and offensive realism will be presented, which will be the basis on which the analytical models will be created from. These analytical models will consist of the main tenets for both theories, and will be complemented by key empirical indicators for the respective tenet and theory. These models will permeate the analysis regarding the Israeli actions against Iran. The framework, and subsequent models, will be based upon the seminal works of Kenneth Waltz and Stephen Walt, regarding defensive realism, and John Mearsheimer, regarding offensive realism. After this, a motivation regarding the chosen theories will be presented. This section will also present a viable delimitation concerning both the empirical and theoretical material. Finally, this passage will present a brief critique against defensive and offensive realism.

2.1. Presentation of theoretical foundations and framework

Both belonging to the neorealist, or structural school within international relations, defensive and offensive realism share some fundamentals but with notable and important differences, including the conclusions they derive from their shared assumptions, that separates them.

Both defensive and offensive realism share two central assumptions about the international system, they both describe a state-centric anarchic system wherein survival is the overarching goal (Waltz, 1979, pp.88-91; Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.30-31). The anarchic international system is characterized by the lack of a global authority, instead states are the central actors (Waltz, 1979, pp.88-89; Mearsheimer, 2001, p.3). Furthermore they both subscribe to the notion that survival is the overarching principle by which states act, from this logic both theories
postulate that states act according to the logic of self-help (Waltz, 1979, p.91; Mearsheimer, 2001, p.33). The logic of self-help hinders the creation of a central global authority, states will not allow themselves to be constrained by international organizations, or agreements for that matter, if they are counterintuitive in regards to their self-interest (Waltz, 1979, p.91; Mearsheimer, 2001, p.46, 49). Mearsheimer deviates from Waltz, and defensive realism, in that he adds three other “bedrock” assumptions, these are;

- States always possess some offensive military capability, enabling them to destroy and hurt each other (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.30-31).
- Uncertainty is a perpetual factor that affects how states behave. The intentions of a rival state can never be predicted with certainty, and thus the possibility of military intervention or actions by a rival state will remain constant (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.31).
- States are rational actors, aware of their surroundings and act strategically within this environment (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.31).

The concept and calculation of power is of importance for all theories that fall under the realist umbrella. There is a notable distinction between what Mearsheimer labels “relative” and “absolute” power, relative power is a means to attain the goal of survival, whereas absolute power is an end in itself. Relative power concerns “the distribution of material capabilities”, and thus entails the aspiration for states to attain a power advantage over potential rivals. In contrast, absolute power concerns only the states’ own gain, thus a state striving for absolute power will still take advantage of opportunities even if it means that a rival state will gain more power (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.12-13, 36-37). Both defensive and offensive realism adheres to the belief that states strive for relative power, and thus relative gains, in order to secure their survival. Subsequently, power in
this essay will be defined as “nothing more than specific assets or material resources that are available to a state” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.57), thus following the template Mearsheimer presents.

The concept of “balance of power”, as put forth by Waltz, stems from the structure of the international system. The anarchic nature wherein states act according to the logic of self-help, enable balance of power to form as an overarching principle that states abide by (Waltz, 1979, pp.88, 118-121). According to this concept, states will choose to ally themselves with the weaker state/states since it is the powerful state/states that threatens them, with the hope of accumulating enough strength to deter their adversaries (Waltz, 1979, pp.126-127). The defensive realist Stephen Walt develops the concept of “balance against threats” wherein he argues that “states ally to balance against threats rather than against power alone” (Walt, 1987, p.5). This deviates from balance against power logic by pointing out that the level of perceived threats is not merely affected by the relative power distributions, but also by “geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions” (Walt, 1987, p.5). It is thus possible for states to ally with a stronger state against a weaker one, if the weaker one is seen as more of a threat, according to the three other factors Walt describes (Walt, 1987, pp.5, 21-22). This theory can be contrasted by Mearsheimer’s statement that “Great powers balance against capabilities, not intentions” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.45).

Mearsheimer does not fully discard the logic of balance of power, but he presents an alternative strategy that he argues states prefers to utilize in order to “check an aggressor”, this being the concept of “buck-passing”, whereby the threatened state tries “to get another state to bear the burden of deterring or possibly fighting an aggressor, while it remains on the sidelines” (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.157-158). The possibility of “free-riding”, and the ability to reduce the number of threatening states they have to deal with at the same time, makes buck-passing an attractive
option for states (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.159-162). According to Mearsheimer, buck-passing will be more prevalent in multipolar systems whereas balancing will primarily occur in bipolar systems, although buck-passing will still be prevalent (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.269-272). Furthermore, the threat level and geographic proximity are determinants of how frequent buck-passing will be, whereby buck-passing will be most frequent “when there is no potential hegemon to contend with, and when the threatened states do not share a common border with the aggressor” (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.267-268).

The main point of contention between defensive and offensive realists, and what differentiates them, is the question of “how much power does a state want”. Defensive realists argue that offensive actions are highly dependent upon the circumstances. Furthermore, they posit that states will reach a point when the search for more power will be counterproductive (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.20). Firstly, aggressive behaviour from another state will lead to cooperation between rivals in order to balance against the aggressive state. Furthermore, it could potentially lead other states to counteract the aggressor by joining forces, leaving the aggressor worse off than before (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.20). Instead states will utilize moderate policies in order to not disturb the balance of power, “the first concern of states is not to maximize power but to maintain their position in the system” (Waltz, 1979, p.126). For defensive realists, states are security maximizers, “the goal the system encourages them to seek is security” (Waltz, 1979, p.126), “In crucial situations, however, the ultimate concern of states is not for power but for security” (Waltz, 1988, p.616). In contrast to this view, offensive realists believe the structure of the international system provides incentives for states to act aggressively, “survival mandates aggressive behaviour” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.21). States will strive to maximize their relative power at the expense of other states, “their ultimate aim is to be the hegemon - that is, the only great
power in the system” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.2). States are thus seen as power maximizers, as opposed to security maximizers that defensive realists postulates.

2.1.1. Conceptual definitions; Bipolarity, multipolarity and hegemony
There remains some key conceptual definitions that will be briefly presented here, these are: bipolarity, multipolarity and hegemony. Both theories explain how different structures of the international order will lead to notable differences concerning peace and stability, by utilizing the concepts of multipolarity and bipolarity. Bipolarity is characterized by two principal great-powers of equal strength that compete and balance each other, whereas in multipolarity there are several great-powers that compete amongst themselves (Waltz, 1979, p.171; Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.44-45). Both theories argue that bipolar systems are the most stable, whereas multipolar systems are more unstable and prone to conflict (Waltz, 1979, pp.170-176; Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.44-45). Mearsheimer further divides multipolarity into balanced and unbalanced, based on the distribution of power between the states, and argues that unbalanced multipolarity is the least stable system (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.44-45). The concept of hegemony is defined by Mearsheimer as follows: “A hegemon is a state so powerful that it dominates all the other states in the system” (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.40). In contrast to Waltz, Mearsheimer distinguishes between regional hegemony and global hegemony, wherein global hegemons dominate the entire world while regional hegemons dominate distinct geographical areas (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.40).

2.2. Development and presentation of the analytical models
The analytical models have been developed by extrapolating, and describing the main features and differences between the two theories. From this theoretical presentation the two overarching principles that
differentiates the theories are presented, these principles are; *states are security maximizers*, for defensive realism, and *states are power maximizers*, for offensive realism. The two competing analytical models consist of the main theoretical tenets and appurtenant empirical indicators for the respective theories. These models will permeate the analysis by its application upon the empirical material and cases. From the empirical discussion the essay will derive whether or not the Israeli actions and conduct can be classified in accordance with either defensive or offensive realism, a mix of both, or show that neither theory can explain the Israeli conduct against Iran.

### 2.2.1. Analytical model for defensive realism; main tenets and its empirical indicators:

*States are security maximizers* (Waltz, 1979, p.126; *Waltz, 1988*, p.616)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets and indicators:</th>
<th>First tenet: States will utilize moderate policies and defensive strategies, to maintain their position in the system and not upset the balance of power (Waltz, 1979, p.126).</th>
<th>Indicator:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Israel will utilize moderate policies and defensive strategies against Iran.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets and indicators:</th>
<th>Second tenet: Alliances will be formed to balance against threatening states (Waltz, 1987, p.5).</th>
<th>Indicator:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Israel will form alliances in order to counteract the threat posed by Iran.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2.2. Analytical model for offensive realism; main tenets and its empirical indicators:

*States are power maximizers (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.21)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tenets and indicators:</th>
<th>First tenet: States are revisionist at their core, utilizing aggressive and offensive strategies (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.29, 35-36, 53-54).</th>
<th>Indicator: - Israel will utilize aggressive and offensive strategies against Iran.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tenets and indicators:</td>
<td>Second tenet: States will strive for hegemony and domination to strengthen their security, they pursue expansionist policies (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.21, 29).</td>
<td>Indicator: - Israel will utilize expansionist policies to strengthen their relative power against Iran.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenets and indicators:</td>
<td>Third tenet: States will utilize buck-passing, rather than balancing (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.267-272).</td>
<td>Indicator: - Israel will try to ”pass the buck” and make another state take the command against Iran.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3. Why these theories

The motivation for choosing the neorealist theories of defensive and offensive realism stems from their continued academic relevance. Moreover, they possess the ability to explain contemptuous conflicts from a state perspective, as well as describing how the structure of the international system affects states behaviour.

Neorealism as an overarching school has been highly influential within IR research. By expanding and further developing the original notions of realism, scholars such as Waltz and Mearsheimer have been able to provide a structural explanation as to how states are affected by the anarchic system that realists posits. The works of Waltz, Walt, and Mearsheimer have been seminal for realism as a whole, and serve as the basis upon which later neorealists scholars expand the respective theories. The theories are frequently used to analyse both past and contemporary conflicts, and predict state behaviour in general, (See: Taliaferro, 2000; Kirshner; 2010; Pashakhanlou, 2014; Golovics, 2017). The continued prevalence of the theories demonstrates how they still remain relevant from a theory testing aspect.

The theories are of utmost relevance to apply upon Israel since they themselves often portray their behaviour as merely necessary actions to survive as a state. The current prime minister, and then opposition leader, Benjamin Netanyahu expressed this sentiment speaking in the Knesset, stating; “The truth is that if Israel were to put down its arms there would be no more Israel. If the Arabs were to put down their arms there would be no more war” (Globes, 2006). Building upon this structural realism, which both theories adhere to, possess the ability to explain how the structure of the international system affects the reasoning and decision making a threatened state like Israel will undertake in order to survive,
and according to offensive realism, how they strengthen their position in the system.

2.4. Delimitation

In order to achieve a coherent and viable essay, theoretical and empirical delimitations will be applied upon the chosen material.

In regards to the theoretical delimitations, the study will not discuss Mearsheimer’s predictions regarding the potential conflicts during the 21st century (Mearshiemer predicts up until 2020). The essay will neither discuss or examine Waltz, Walt, or Mearsheimer’s empirical discussions and descriptions that they utilize in order to provide proof of the applicability of their theories. Both these factors fall outside the scope of this study, and thus this kind of critical discussion becomes superfluous, within the given aim. Lastly, the theoretical part has been delimitated to include only these three scholars with the reasoning being their role as seminal academics for these two theories.

The empirical delimitation that will be applied in relation to the Israeli actions against Iran, will be the time period of 2007-2020 examining two cases. These cases are the Israeli actions against the Iranian nuclear program, and the Israeli actions against Iranian entrenchment in Syria. This particular time frame was chosen since it can be seen as the start of a new era, wherein Israel more proactively pursues clandestine and military operations against Iran. In 2007 an Iranian nuclear scientist “died under mysterious circumstances” with allegations levied against Israel that they were behind it, as a part of their multifaceted operations against the Iranian nuclear program (Bergman, 2018, pp. 607-609). Since the assassination in 2007, at least five or six other prominent Iranian

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4 Defined as, “Any activity or operation sponsored or conducted by governmental departments or agencies with the intent to assure secrecy and concealment”, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf
scientists associated with the nuclear program has been targeted and killed with direct involvement of Israel (Butler, 2010a; 2010b; Bahgat, 2018, p.67; Bergman, 2018, pp.578-580, 607-609), most recently Mohsen Fakhrizadeh (Fassihi, Sanger E., Schmitt & Bergman, 2020). Fakhrizadeh was considered the leading Iranian scientist associated with the nuclear program, and also served as a member of the IRGC5 (Fitzpatrick, 2006, p.530; Rezaei & Khodaei Moshirabad, 2018, pp.141-142;).

Since the essay deals with a delimited timeframe and assortment of cases, there remain certain relevant cases that fall outside the scope of this essay. Among these are, Israeli attacks and operations against Iranian harbors and ports, (Nakashima & Warrwick, 2020; Gol, 2020; ), Israeli airstrikes in Sudan targeting munitions factories belonging to the IRGC and Iranian arms smuggling (Time, 2009; Black, 2012; Laessing & Abdelaziz, 2012; Harel & Issacharoff, 2012; Zohar, 2015, pp.441-445; Bergman, 2018, p.625). Operations carried out prior to 2007 naturally falls outside the scope of this essay. A delimitation of the research subject was necessary in order to make the essay coherent and feasible, and thus the chosen cases are deemed ample enough and sufficient in order to enable a categorization of the Israeli conduct.

2.5. Critique of the theories

Defensive realism has been criticized for a perceived status quo bias within its theory (See: Schweller, 1996). Mearsheimer argues that the structure of the international system prohibits states from becoming status quo states, since their incentive for expansion will persist, with the exception of hegemonic states that strive for status quo in order to maintain their domination of the system (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.2, 21). Mearsheimer further criticises defensive realism’s naivety in propagating that states strive for “enough power”. Firstly, he argues, one cannot assess

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5 Abbreviation of: Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
what constitutes enough relative power a state needs to attain in order to maintain their security. Secondly, he argues, the difficulty of future considerations prohibits the logic of “enough power”. Power distributions vary over time, and a peaceful neighbour of today may evolve into an aggressive rival in the future (Mearsheimer, 2001, pp.34-35). States will thus remain revisionist at their core. This logic regarding the perpetual state of uncertainty that states act within, applies to all countries to varying degrees. It can be exemplified by the evolving relationships Israel have had with Egypt on the one hand, and Iran on the other. The relationship with Egypt evolved from hostility towards friendlier relations (Wolf, 2015 pp.159-161), whereas their relations with Iran evolved in the opposite direction from cordiality towards hostility (Parsi, 2007, pp.22-28, 79-86; Bergman, 2018, pp.362-368).

Two of the more prominent and contemporary IR theories that challenge the basic assumptions of realism are, the “democratic peace” theory belonging to the liberal school (See: Russett, 1993) and the “securitization” theory belonging to the “Copenhagen school” (See: Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1997). The basic assumption is that democratic states resolve their issues without military force and that they rarely, if ever, wage war against each other. Thus the realist notion that state behaviour depends on the external rather than the internal structure, will be disproven (See: Russett, 1993; Russett, Layne, Spiro & Doyle, 1995). Securitization theory argues that security and security threats are social constructs, in which certain actors possess the ability to steer in certain directions in order to invoke certain responses (See: Buzan et. al., 1997; Balzacq, 2010; Balzacq, Léonard & Ruzicka, 2016). This logic deviates from the realist notion of a predetermined international structure that influences how states act.
3. Method and material

In this section a discussion regarding the chosen cases of study and the methodology the essay implements, covering the reason the specific methods were chosen as opposed to alternative methods, will be had. Furthermore, a critical discussion about the selection and motivation for the chosen material will be presented. Moreover, the research design the essay implements will be presented. Lastly, a discussion about validity, generalizability, and reliability will be presented.

3.1. Theory testing case studies

This thesis will take the form of a qualitative theory testing case study, wherein the competing theories of defensive and offensive realism will be applied upon Israel and Iran’s relations between 2007-2020, in order to analyse the Israeli conduct against Iran. From this, two cases concerning Israeli actions against Iran have been selected, to serve as the bases upon which the empirical presentation, analysis, and subsequent conclusions will be held. The two cases, Israeli actions against the Iranian nuclear program and Israeli actions against Iranian entrenchment in Syria, have been chosen in order to enable an analysis dealing with both covert and overt\(^6\) operations.

A case study, as defined by George and Bennett, involves the study of events of scientific interest, such as revolutions, regime types, different economic systems etc (George & Bennett, 2005, pp.17-18). Furthermore, they state “A case study is thus a well-defined aspect of a historical episode that the investigator selects for analysis, rather than a historic event itself” (George & Bennett, 2005, p.18). In accordance with this description, the empirical cases are deemed to be of scientific interest since they serve to show how Israel acts, within the context of their

contemporary and contemptuous relationship with Iran. As previously mentioned, the cases are relevant since they are principal cases that IR theories should be applied upon. The previous lack of theory application upon them means that they lack the important research dimension IR theories provide, regarding why Israel acted in certain ways as opposed to alternative actions. Moreover, the fact that the cases are contemporary combined with a lack of previous theory application upon them further substantiate the relevance for academic research upon the subjects.

George and Bennett describes and explains that theory testing is to “assess the validity and scope conditions of single or competing theories” (George & Bennett, 2005, p.75). In accordance with the theory testing method this essay will test two competing theories, by structuring scientific queries and hypotheses, to be applied upon the empirical cases and material (Esaiasson et. al., 2017, pp.41-43). The theories have been operationalized into two competing analytical models, based around the main tenets and their appurtenant empirical indicators for each of the theories.

This methodology was deemed most suitable for this essay since there is a scientific gap to fill concerning how Israel's conflict with Iran, and their foreign policy in general, can be understood through the use of IR theories (Esaiasson et. al., 2017, pp.32-34). This essay will thus provide scientific knowledge regarding how two influential IR theories can explain their conduct, in order to fill this scientific gap (Esaiasson et. al., 2017, pp.32-33). Moreover, theory testing case studies enables the researcher to “assess the validity and scope conditions of single or competing theories” (George & Bennett, 2005, p.75), which means that the assertions of defensive and offensive realism can be empirically tested. By utilizing and testing already existing theories, through the creation of analytical models that permeates the empirical analysis, the
researcher avoids the problem of “datafitting”. Datafitting is often associated with theory developing studies, wherein the researcher adjusts their theory to fit their empirical findings. By creating analytical models prior to the empirical analysis, which this essay does, the researcher cannot be accused of altering their theories and models to fit the empirical results (Esaiasson et. al., 2017, p.113).

3.2. Material

The essay will consist of both theoretical and empirical material. The theoretical part will be based upon the seminal works of Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt, and John Mearsheimer. The empirical material will be a solid mix of academic works, books rendered relevant for the empirical analysis, various news outlets and articles reporting relevant information for the cases of study, and official governmental statements, reports, and documents.

Source criticism will be employed upon the material the essay will utilize. The academic articles and papers will be filtered as to primarily include material that has been peer-reviewed, in order to strengthen their credibility. Furthermore, source criticism will be employed to ensure that the sources are not tendentious, and that they obtain a high degree of independence. In order to achieve this, the essay will utilize several different sources that are independent of each other. This will enable us to see if the empirical descriptions are consistent or if some sources portray the events in ways that substantially deviate from competing sources. Furthermore, eventual governmental statements concerning specific events will be complemented with academic works and independent news outlets, in order to reduce the potential effect of tendentious stories governments may try to portray (Esaiasson et. al., 2017, pp.292-296).
A potential aggravating circumstance concerns part of the cases of study, covert operations are per definition meant to conceal the identity, or enable plausible deniability, of the actor responsible. As Bergman points out, Israel guards their military secrets extremely tight, both by law and by the internal culture within the defense establishment. Furthermore, Israel generally does not officially acknowledge covert operations attributed to them, meaning that even if the operatives responsible for different operations step forward this should not be seen as an official acknowledgement by the state of Israel (Bergman, 2018, pp.xiii-xv).

3.3. Validity, reliability, and generalizability

By utilizing already existing and influential theories that are frequently used in academic research, and operationalizing these theories into two competing analytical models that permeates the analysis, the essay will attain a high degree of conceptual validity. The chosen indicators, utilized to operationalize the theories, are partly based upon what previous scholars have utilized, as well as logical derivations for how the theoretical concepts can be examined empirically (Esaiasson et. al., 2017, pp.61-62). The creation of competing analytical models, that will permeate the analysis, will minimize the possibility of systematic errors when deriving conclusions from the analysis (Essaiasson et. al., 2017, pp.58-66). Moreover, there is an inherent strength in case studies concerning its ability to transmit theoretical concepts onto the chosen empirical cases. Case studies enables the researcher to choose fewer cases that are more fitting for their theoretical concepts of study, thus avoiding the problem of conceptual stretching associated with statistical studies (George & Bennett, 2005, pp.19-20). For this essay, this meant that two cases, within a delimited timeframe, could be chosen in order to examine the theoretical concepts of defensive and offensive realism. This ensured that the cases fell within the theoretical parameters, as evidenced by the empirical indicators. To obtain a good result validity, the researcher has to
obtain both a high degree of conceptual validity combined with good reliability. Reliability concerns the absence of unsystematic and random errors, in this essay this will be achieved by a systematic, open, and transparent treatment of the empirical sources to ensure that the presentation and subsequent derivations are correct (Esaiasson et. al., 2017, pp.64-65).

By examining the theories of defensive and offensive realism, this essay will test two competing explanations as to why states act as they do. This will enable us to provide cumulative and general knowledge as to why states act in a specific way, and if this behaviour can be understood by utilizing these theories. This can provide cumulative proof concerning whether or not the theories possess predictive power, concerning state behaviour (George & Bennett, 2005, pp.130-131). Furthermore, the essay aims to provide general knowledge as to Israel's regional strategy to assure their survival, i.e. whether or not it can be understood as either following defensive or offensive realism. This aim is partly dependent on the results this essay provides, if the chosen theories are deemed unable to explain Israel's conduct towards Iran it cannot be argued with certainty that the same theories can explain their more broad regional conduct. However, even if the theories do not explain this specific case they cannot be fully discarded as possessing explanatory power in regards to other cases, but they will lose credibility (George & Bennett, 2005, pp.115-117, 123-124).

3.4. Research design

The thesis is structured around the two competing theories of defensive and offensive realism, and their application upon two cases concerning Israeli actions against Iran. Following the theoretical presentation two competing analytical models, consisting of tenets and empirical indicators, have been erected. These models will be utilized in order to
derive conclusions from the presentation of the empirical cases. The cases of study concerns Israeli actions against the Iranian nuclear program and their clashes with Iranian forces in Syria. The empirical analysis will be presented in a systematic way, wherein firstly a brief background will be presented. This will be followed by presenting the cases, starting with the Israeli actions against the Iranian nuclear program followed by Israeli actions against Iranian entrenchment in Syria. After this the conclusions that can be drawn from the cases following the application of the analytical models will be divided into two sections and appurtenant subsections. Firstly, defensive realism will be assessed in which each tenet, and their indicator, will be assessed separately. Secondly, offensive realism will be assessed in which each tenet, and their indicator, will be assessed separately. The analytical models will be applied when drawing conclusions from the cases, in order to test and conclude whether or not the tenets and appurtenant indicators possess explanatory power. The final section of the essay will be a conclusive discussion in which the research question will be answered, and the correct hypothesis presented, based on the results of the analysis. Furthermore, the theoretical, empirical and methodological conclusions will be discussed. Lastly, suggestions for future research will be discussed.
4. Presentation & Analysis following the application of the analytical models

As previously mentioned, the relationship between Israel and Iran has been highly contemptuous since the Iranian revolution of 1979 (Parsi, 2007, pp.79-86), with Ruhollah Khomeini identifying Israel as a paramount enemy for Iran and muslims worldwide (See: Reda, 2016).

Israel’s distrust of Iran and their intentions are well documented, with the opposition towards Iranian nuclear program as perhaps the most explicit example of this sentiment. Benjamin Netanyahu conveyed the Israeli attitude towards the Iranian nuclear program when he in a UN speech in 2012 argued that “faced with a clear red line, Iran will back down”. He argued that Iran had already obtained 70% of the enriched uranium needed for nuclear weapons, and that the following spring at current rates they would obtain 90%, stressing the need for international pressure on Iran to completely dismantle the program (United Nations, 2012). The nuclear deal Iran signed in 2015 with several other countries, most importantly America, was designed to limit the Iranian uranium enrichment (Mousavian, 2018 p.181). The covert Israeli strategy to destabilize the Iranian nuclear program can be divided into two overarching areas. Firstly, they utilize targeted assassinations of key individuals (See: Bergman, 2018; Bahgat, 2018), secondly they target the nuclear facilities themselves either through cyberwarfare or through covert attacks on the facilities (See: Lindsay, 2013, pp.366, 385-389; Shakarian, Shakarian & Ruef, 2013, pp.224-235; Strategic Comments, 2020, pp.i-iii).

Syria is a strategically important country for Iran, partly because of its proximity with Israel as an neighbouring country. Syria is a part of the “Axis of Resistance”, most importantly consisting of Iran, Hezbollah, and
Syria. Syria is utilized by Iran and its proxies as a smuggling route for weapons (Herzog, 2019; Even, 2019), while Iran simultaneously both deploys military forces and builds military bases in the country (Nadimi, 2018a). Israel has explicitly declared several redlines that they will not tolerate if they are crossed, included among these are a permanent Iranian military presence in Syria close to the Israeli border (Times of Israel, 2019). Israel has implemented the doctrine of “Campaign between wars” (CBW), authored in 2015 by the then chief of the Israeli Defense Forces Gadi Eisenkot⁷, as the overarching strategy in Syria among other countries. This doctrine entails “proactive, offensive actions based on extremely high-quality intelligence and clandestine efforts” (Eisenkot & Siboni, 2019).

4.1. Israeli actions against the Iranian nuclear program

The fear posed by a nuclear Iran was shared with many of the Arab states, a fact that Israel utilized as part of their strategy against Iran. By secretly cooperating with other Arab states and their intelligence bodies Israel gathered, among other information, information about the nuclear program (Bergman, 2018, pp.579-581). As part of the comprehensive Israeli strategy against Iran, that include both covert and overt operations but for this essay will focus on the covert side, the U.S. and Israel developed “a quadrilateral collaboration between the CIA, the NSA, the Mossad and the Israeli military intelligence agency, AMAN” (Bergman, 2018, p.607).

Israel has employed a comprehensive and coherent strategy of targeting key individuals within the Iranian nuclear program and as of today they have been responsible for targeting seven scientists, killing six of them, this figure not including lower ranking individuals. This comprehensive

⁷ A english translate of the complete strategy document is available from: https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/IDFDoctrineTranslation.pdf
and coherent Israeli strategy to actively seek to deter, destabilize, and hinder the Iranian nuclear program, finds its starting point in 2007 with the death of Ardeshir Hosseinpour in what Iranian intelligence believes was an Israeli assassination (Bergman, 2018, p.608; Vielhaber & Bleek, 2012, p.482). Between 2010-2012, five Iranian scientists were targeted, of which four were killed, in assassinations attributed to Israel. In 2010 three attacks were executed, starting in January with the assassination of Masoud Alimohammadi who was an leading scientist within the nuclear project (Bergman, 2018, p.608, 622; Butler, 2010a), followed in November by the attempted assassination of the senior scientists Majid Shahriari and Fereydoon Abbasi-Davani. Shahriari were killed, whereas Abbasi-Davani survived (Bergman, 2018, p.622; Butler, 2010b) and continued to be an prominent member as evidenced by his promotion to head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and one of the vice presidents of Iran, positions he held between 2011-2013 (Reuters, 2011). In 2011 Darioush Rezaeinejad, a senior researcher at the AEOI, was assassinated (Bergman, 2018, p.624; Tobey, 2012, p.62, 65), and in 2012 the chemical engineer Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan was assassinated (Bergman, 2018, p.626; Weinberger, 2012). In November 2020 Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was assassinated in Tehran, with Iran accusing Israel and the U.S. of being behind the assassination (Fassihi, Sanger E., Schmitt & Bergman, 2020). Mohsen Fakhrizadeh had long been identified by several countries and organisations, including Israel and most notably in a 2011 report from the International Atomic Energy Agency, as perhaps the most important nuclear scientist (IAEA, 2011, p.5; Bergman, 2018, p.608; Dahl, 2011). Of particular interest is the fact that in 2018 Benjamin Netanyahu explicitly named Fakhrizadeh as the scientist responsible for the nuclear project, with the now famous line “remember that name” (Halbfinger, Sanger & Bergman, 2018; Ahronheim, 2020). The commonality between these scientists, apart from Ahmadi-Roshan, is that they all had been identified as leading and senior individuals within the
nuclear project, with most of them belonging to the “weapons group” (Bergman, 2018, p.626). Both officially and unofficially the U.S. denies any involvement and prior knowledge of the assassinations, with the former CIA director Michael Hayden vehemently stating the U.S. had no prior knowledge of the Israeli assassinations (Bergman, 2018, p.626). It is difficult to assess U.S. knowledge and potential assistance in the assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, stemming from the recency of the assassination (See: Yadlin & Orion, 2020).

Simultaneously with their strategy of targeted assassinations, Israel has targeted the nuclear facilities through cyberwarfare. The comprehensive “Operation Olympic Games” was an joint Israeli-U.S. venture started in 2006, consisting of several computer viruses with different purposes (Bergman, 2018, pp.607-608, 627; Kamiński, 2020, p.64; Lindsay, 2013, pp.366, 385-389). Discovered in 2010, the “Stuxnet virus” was developed, as part of “Olympic Games”, jointly by the NSA from the U.S. and unit 8200 of Israel (Bergman, 2018, pp.607-608; Kamiński, 2020, p.64; Lindsay, 2013, pp.366, 385-389). The virus targeted the centrifuges of the nuclear reactors in Natanz, destroying around 1000 centrifuges with estimations of delays of at least one year for nuclear program (Albright, Brannan & Walrond, 2010, pp.1-10; Shakarian, Shakarian & Ruef, 2013, pp.224-235). Another virus was discovered in 2011 codenamed “Duqu”, it shares several similarities with the stuxnet virus although their purposes are different. While stuxnet was designed to target the infrastructure of the nuclear facilities, Duqu was designed to gather information with some experts arguing that this virus was used to gather the information needed for the stuxnet virus regarding the nuclear facility in Natanz (Shakarian, Shakarian & Ruef, 2013, pp.160-169). This year Iran hinted at a new Israeli/U.S. cyberattack targeting their nuclear facilities (Reuters, 2020). The Israeli strategy against the Iranian nuclear program also entails bombing the nuclear facilities themselves, with
several reports of these activities over the years (See: Kamiński, 2020, p.68; Times of Israel, 2013; Strategic Comments, 2020, pp.i-iii). During 2020 there have been several targeted bombings against the nuclear facilities with Israel officially avoiding responsibility, but with unofficial Israeli sources claiming Israel as responsible (The Economist, 2020; Strategic Comments, 2020, pp.i-iii; Fassihi, Pérez-Peña & Bergman, 2020; Sanger, Schmitt & Bergman, 2020).

4.2. Israeli actions against Iran in Syria

Israel have vehemently stressed their opposition towards the Iranian entrenchment in Syria. They argue this poses a threat to their country, arguing that Iran utilizes Syria to smuggle weapons to military proxies fighting against Israel and building a new military frontier against Israel from which they can and are attacking Israel (See: Eisenstadt & Knights, 2018; Nadimi, 2018a; Ghaddar & Smyth, 2018; Yadlin & Orion, 2019).

The implementation of CBW doctrine is evident in Syria through “Operation Chess” and “Operation House of Cards” during May 2018. Operation Chess entailed Israeli bombardment of a Syrian air base targeting a shipment of advanced air defense weapons and killing at least seven Iranian revolutionary guards (Ari Gross, 2018b; Syrian observatory for human rights, 2018), which later prompted Iran to respond by launching up to 20 rockets at Israeli military bases (Ari Gross, 2018a). Operation House of Cards was a response to the aforementioned Iranian rocket attacks and the largest Israeli air campaign in Syria in over 40 years, targeting the vast Iranian military infrastructure in Syria (Syrian observatory for human rights, 2018; Nadimi, 2018b; Brun, 2019). Israel has continued their comprehensive strategy of attacking Iranian targets in Syria since these two operations, in continuation with the CBW doctrine (See: Yadlin & Orion, 2019; Even, 2019; Heller & Al-Khalidi, 2020; BBC, 2020). In 2019 Israel acknowledged wide scale strikes against
Iranian targets, which they labeled as retaliatory strikes following Iranian rocket strikes against Israeli territory (BBC, 2019). According to estimations Israel has, since 2017, attacked around 1000 targets belonging to Iran, Hezbollah, and Syria (Even, 2019; Kubovich, 2020). Gadi Eisenkot has argued that the CBW doctrine should be adopted by other international forces and lay the groundwork for strategic alliances against Iran (Eisenkot & Siboni, 2019).

The U.S. are supportive of the Israeli position and efforts in Syria with James Jeffrey, the then American representative for Syria (U.S. Department of State, 2020), referring to their actions as “self-defense” originating from the existential threat posed by Iran. Furthermore, when asked what kind of support the U.S. offers he answered rather vaguely but revealing, stating, “We give the support that is needed for effective Israeli actions to protect itself…” (Hamidi, 2020). The Israeli reaction to the American withdrawal in Syria was characterised by the threat they believe Iran poses, believing Iran would utilize this in order to consolidate their entrenchment and enable them to operate closer to the Israeli border. Although American military in Syria was limited, around 2000 troops, some experts believe they acted as a deterrent for further Iranian entrenchment (Herzog, 2019; Ahren, 2018). Following the withdrawal Benjamin Netanyahu both applauded the support Israel has received from America, while simultaneously maintaining the Israeli motto “Israel will protect itself, on its own, against any threat” (Magib, 2019). Furthermore, Netanyahu said that Israel would escalate their fight against Iranian-aligned forces in Syria, stating that they “will continue to act very aggressively against Iran’s efforts to entrench in Syria” (Herzog, 2019; Williams, 2018). The U.S. has tried to ensure Israel that they still fully support their actions and that they will continue to cooperate in order to stop the regional threat Iran poses (Ayyub, 2019). According to Donald
Trump, the U.S. will leave a small number of troops in Syria following requests from Israel and Jordan (Times of Israel, 2019).

4.3. Application of defensive realism upon the Israeli conduct against Iran.

4.3.1. Assessing the first tenet of defensive realism
The first empirical indicator to be assessed in this analysis concerning defensive realism is the following:

- Israel will utilize moderate policies and defensive strategies against Iran

In the case of Israeli actions against the Iranian nuclear program the first empirical indicators were found to be false. The strategy of targeting key individuals within the nuclear program was on the contrary a rather offensive strategy with the aim of obstructing, delaying, and hopefully dissuading Iran completely, from obtaining nuclear weapons. By targeting scientists Israel ran the risk of retaliations by Iran while simultaneously bending the international legality with their actions, thus deviating from the logic of moderation. Furthermore, Operation Olympic Games was an expansive and offensive act, likewise working in an legal grey area. The scale of the operation and the damage it caused, makes it neither moderate nor defensive. The targeted bombings of the nuclear facilities are deemed as neither defensive nor moderate. This stems from the frequency by which Israel has implemented this strategy, in conjunction with the nature of the attacks as direct offensive actions against another state's infrastructure. Of importance to note is the fact that Israel implemented these different strategies simultaneously in conjunction with the timeframe of these actions indicating the comprehensiveness of the Israeli strategy, making it hard to argue that these were defensive and moderate.
A potential argument for this being a defensive strategy is the existential threat posed by a nuclear Iran, with this legitimising the Israeli strategy as defensive. However, this is not a persuasive argument for two reasons. Firstly, it presupposes that this goal can be achieved by any means necessary and still be deemed as defensive. This logic is rather paradoxical as it would mean that anything short of a full scale invasion can be seen as defensive, even if they are in an legal grey area and involve multidimensional attacks against another country's citizens and infrastructure. Secondly, it is far too dependent on the hypothesis that Iran would actually utilize their nuclear weapons against Israel, and that the measures Israel has taken to hinder Iran are therefore defensive acts. Although this hypothesis cannot be discarded, it cannot be the basis upon which the argument for the Israeli actions as defensive is based.

In the case of the Israeli actions in Syria the findings are rather contradictory, on the one hand Israel argue that the Iranian entrenchment poses an immediate security threat, while on the other hand the doctrine they implement is explicitly offensive in its nature. The argument for their Syrian strategy being defensive is more persuasive than the previous case regarding the Iranian nuclear program. The reasoning for this is because Syria is already used as a frontier for Iran and their proxies, and it is proven that both Iran and their proxies have utilized Syria as a base from which they can strike Israel. Compared to their actions against the nuclear program in which they targeted a future capability, in Syria they target immediate threats to their security. However, whilst the Israeli actions can be seen as defensive they can hardly be seen as moderate. As part of the CBW doctrine Israel has carried out their largest air campaign in Syria in 40 years, whilst attacking over 1000 targets belonging to Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran. This indicates the extensive campaigns Israel has implemented in Syria as part of the CBW doctrine, deviating from any reasonable definition of moderation.
4.3.2. Assessing the second tenet of defensive realism

The second empirical indicator to be assessed in this analysis concerning defensive realism is the following:

- Israel will form alliances in order to counteract the threat posed by Iran

This empirical indicator was found to match the Israeli actions against the Iranian nuclear program. Two instances can be found regarding alliance formations stemming from the threat posed by a nuclear Iran, the extensive cooperation with the U.S. and the Arab intelligence cooperation. Israel and the U.S. developed a quadrilateral collaboration, they cooperated during Operation Olympic Games, and although it is currently uncertain cooperation in the Fakhrizadeh assassination cannot be excluded. The alliance with the U.S. is partly based around the existential threat Iran poses to Israel, with the U.S. supporting the Israeli cause as self-defense. Although Israel cooperated with other Arab countries and their intelligence agencies this was not an formalised and officially acknowledged alliance. However, the mere fact that they cooperated with other Arab intelligence agencies and that this was explicitly based around the perceived threat posed by a nuclear Iran, proves their shared interests and willingness to form alliances even with countries they otherwise share an intricate relationship with. Their cooperation with the Arab countries is in accordance with the principles set forth by Walt regarding relative power distribution, and most importantly “geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions” (Walt, 1987, p.5) which all can be found in these alliances. Their alliance with the U.S. slightly differs in regards to its conformity with Walt’s principles, naturally the U.S. does not have any geographic proximity to Iran. However, their commonality with Israel lies in their shared fear of the threat a nuclear Iran would pose. Nuclear weapons
would give Iran increased offensive capabilities and both Israel and America fears that Iran would stay true to their stated intentions against Israel, which they maintain is an illegitimate country.

In the case of their actions in Syria it is evident that they have sought after and maintained an alliance with the U.S. which has been explicitly based around the threat Iran poses to Israel. Furthermore, the advocating from Gadi Eisenkot regarding the expansion of the CBW to incorporate other international forces and the formation of alliances based on those principles shows the Israeli aspiration for alliances. However, their success rate of forming alliances in Syria is markedly lower. Their alliance with the U.S. is not as comprehensive, which is evident by the lack of direct American involvement or cooperation with Israel, compared to their cooperation against the nuclear program. Furthermore, they have not succeeded in forming an regional alliance with the Arab countries to deter Iranian entrenchment in Syria.

4.4. Application of offensive realism upon the Israeli conduct against Iran.

4.4.1. Assessing the first tenet of offensive realism
The first empirical indicator to be assessed in this analysis concerning offensive realism is the following:

- Israel will utilize aggressive and offensive strategies against Iran.

When assessing the Israeli actions against the Iranian nuclear program, it was concluded that their behaviour matched the first indicator for offensive realism. Israel incorporated several different strategies simultaneously making their campaign extensive, targeting different aspects that are important for the nuclear program. Furthermore, the assassinations were preemptive strikes with the explicit aim of obstructing and destabilizing the nuclear program, while simultaneously frightening
the scientists involved. Expanding upon this reasoning, assassinating other countries citizens is an offensive and highly aggressive act working within an legal grey area, risking possible retaliations in conjunction with International condemnation. The fact that Israel does not officially take responsibility for these acts can be seen as an awareness of the nature of these attacks as offensive and aggressive. In regards to the comprehensive cyberwarfare waged by Israel it should be classified as an aggressive and offensive act, the reasoning for this is threefold. Firstly, due to its comprehensiveness involving several different computer viruses attacking different aspects of the nuclear program, whilst being active over several years causing substantial damage. Secondly, due to the nature of the Stuxnet and Duqu viruses. Stuxnet was designed to essentially destroy important infrastructure at the nuclear facility, whereas Duqu was designed to covertly collect the information necessary for the Stuxnet virus. Lastly, the operation as a whole involved two state actors attacking another state's infrastructure covertly causing substantial damage. These facts prove how their cyberwarfare was intrinsically offensive and aggressive in its nature. The targeted bombings of nuclear facilities is deemed as offensive and aggressive since it is a display of direct offensive action against another country's infrastructure. In summary, Israel acts according to a logic of utilizing any means necessary in order to prohibit Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, including these offensive and aggressive measures.

In the case of the Israeli actions in Syria they implement an doctrine based around aggressive and offensive strategies, with the CBW doctrine explicitly calling for proactive and offensive actions. The actions Israel has taken in Syria has been proactive by targeting Iranian forces, weapon smuggling and Iranian military bases all with the aim of prohibiting Iranian entrenchment. However, as previously mentioned their actions can also be assessed as defensive, stemming from the threat posed by the
Iranian entrenchment. Furthermore, Iran is currently using Syria as a military frontier against Israel which poses a direct threat for Israel. They smuggle weapons to proxy groups that utilize them against Israel, they launch air strikes against Israeli territory and they have military bases close to the Israeli border. Despite this it is important to note that although some aspects of their actions can be seen as defensive they cannot be seen as moderate, and should instead be classified as aggressive. This is evident considering the scale of the Israeli actions and their timeframe, for example they launched their largest air campaign in 40 years targeting in Iranian military infrastructure in Syria.

4.4.2. Assessing the second tenet of offensive realism

The second empirical indicator to be assessed in this analysis concerning offensive realism is the following:

- Israel will utilize expansionist policies to strengthen their relative power against Iran

The second indicator was found to be false in both cases, they did not exhibit expansionist tendencies in that they strived for or attained geographical gains. Their actions against the Iranian nuclear program did not entail expansionist goals, instead it was limited to the goal of hindering Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Their actions against the Syrian entrenchment did not entail expansionist goals, which is evident by the fact that Israel has neither made any land acquisitions nor have they tried to. Instead their actions were based on the security concern Iranian entrenchment in Syria would entail. However, their actions against the Iranian nuclear program can be seen as achieving a relative power advantage against Iran, although not through expansionism. This power advantage stems from Israel's own nuclear capability as a deterrent against a full scale Iranian attack, whilst a nuclear Iran would pose an existential threat for Israel.
4.4.3. Assessing the third tenet of offensive realism

The third empirical indicator to be assessed in this analysis concerning offensive realism is the following:

- Israel will try to “pass the buck” and make another state take the command against Iran

The third indicator was found to be false in both cases. In their opposition against the Iranian nuclear program they did cooperate with both Arab countries, and most importantly America. Furthermore, they did ask for other countries, especially America, to play a more active role against the nuclear program and their entrenchment in Syria. However, “buck-passing” would entail Israel taking a step back and being a passive party in the conflict. This does not hold true, Israel has maintained that they will play an active role against Iran and they still refer to their motto “Israel will protect itself, on its own, against any threat” as an guiding principle they abide by. The theory predicts that since they do not share a border with Iran they would utilize “buck-passing”, which is proven to be false. Furthermore, Israel has implemented a large number of operations against Iran unilaterally. This is evident by their assassinations of Iranian scientists and their bombings of nuclear facilities, as well as their actions in Syria which they have undertaken on their own without direct involvement of another country. Although they were disappointed by the American withdrawal from Syria this is not an indicator of an aspiration for “buck-passing” to the U.S. This is evident by the fact that Israel ramped up their campaigns following this decision, as well as the lack of direct American involvement even when they had forces in Syria.
5. Conclusions

In answering the question “Which of the theories explains the Israeli conduct against Iran better”, it was concluded that defensive realism possessed the greater explanatory power in accordance with the first hypothesis. This conclusion is supported by the analysis, in which it was concluded that the first indicator could partly explain Israel's actions in Syria, whilst the second indicator held true for both cases. Although the first indicator could not explain the Israeli actions against the nuclear program, and that the principle of moderation was not applicable on their actions in Syria, it was still concluded that defensive realism held the greater explanatory power. Although the first indicator for offensive realism held true for their actions against the nuclear program, it could not fully explain their behaviour in Syria. Furthermore, both the second and third indicator was unequivocally false when applied to the Israeli actions in both cases, which further cemented defensive realism as possessing the greater explanatory power. In conclusion if we merely look at the overarching principles for both theories, security maximizers according to defensive realism and power maximizers according to offensive realism, it is evident that Israel acted according to the overarching principle set forth by defensive realism.

The theoretical conclusions that were gathered from this essay shows that both theories are still relevant when researching state behaviour. Furthermore, it is important to note that the result was not unequivocal since both theories possessed certain deficiencies in particular offensive realism. The logic of moderation that defensive realism poses was proved to be false when assessed upon the Israeli behavior, whilst the last two tenets of offensive realism was proved to not be applicable on the Israeli behaviour. It is possible that other theories could possess greater explanatory power when applied to Israeli conduct against Iran, stemming from the lack of an unequivocal concordance with either of the theories.
utilized. The lack of concordance is especially distinct for offensive realism, which could weaken the applicability of the theory, however, this cannot be decisively concluded for three reasons. Firstly the sample size is too small as it merely involves two cases, secondly the first tenet and appurtenant indicator were applicable, lastly Israel might be merely an outlier. When assessing the empirical descriptions and conclusions it is argued that the descriptions are correct, and that the subsequent conclusions are thus based on correct descriptions of the events of study. This stems from the wide array of sources which the essay utilizes that corroborate the description the essay emphasizes. When assessing the methodology this essay employs it is concluded that the essay utilized the most central litterature, both in regards to the theoretical books and concerning the empirical cases. Furthermore, the essay utilized several academic articles and reports in order to circumvent the lack of a comprehensive book describing Israeli actions against Iran in Syria. This was found to effectively circumvent the lack of a comprehensive book, and furthermore enabled extensive corroboration from different sources. Furthermore, the research methods the essay implemented was found to effectively enable a classification of the Israeli conduct whilst simultaneously providing a research dimension previously lacking. Furthermore, the analytical models were effective in order to facilitate a classification of their conduct against Iran, thus achieving both good validity and reliability, achieving a good result validity, as the methodology predicted. If the essay employed another research methodology the implementation and subsequent result would have differed. If the essay instead utilized a theory consuming methodology the cases would have been the vocal point instead of the theories, which would have meant a different type of result and scientific knowledge.
5.1. Future research

Following the findings of this essay future research could examine the Israeli conduct in a broader sense, involving their strategy towards other regional countries. This could facilitate further discussion regarding whether or not their conduct against Iran is merely an outlier, or if it is consistent with their general strategy to ensure state survival, as both theories would predict. Furthermore, future research could utilize the same framework of the analytical models in order to examine the Iranian conduct against Israel, and if their behaviour likewise follows either theory. This would be relevant since Israel does not act within a vacuum, instead this is a contemporary conflict between two countries and classifying the Iranian behaviour is as relevant as classifying the Israeli behaviour. Lastly, future research could also apply different theories upon the Israeli conduct, in order to conclude if these theories possess greater explanatory power than the neorealist theories this essay employs.
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