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Explaining Media Frames of Contested Foreign Conflicts: Irish National 'Opinion Leader' Newspapers' Frames of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (July 2000 to July 2004)

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the key findings of PhD research that analysed how four Irish national 'opinion leader' newspapers – *The Irish Times*, the *Irish Independent*, the *Sunday Independent* and the *Sunday Tribune* – framed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from July 2000 to July 2004 (O'Regan, 2007).

Two sets of significant findings emerged from this research. Firstly, this research's qualitative frame analysis found that the sampled newspapers acted as contested sites that variously displayed competing frames of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, rather than exclusively transmitting hegemonic, or elitist frames. Secondly, it was concluded that the politics and dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself influenced newspaper coverage trends, as did the politico-cultural context supplied by Ireland's 'small state' and post-colonial status and its consequent lack of 'hard' foreign policies towards the Middle East. A range of media factors, such as resource constraints, editorial judgments and news values, also had important constructivist implications for newspaper outcomes.

Taken together, these findings strongly critique the propaganda, hegemonic and political control perspectives that have characterised research to date. Instead, this research concluded that competing conflict protagonists' level of media access is best viewed as an achieved outcome, which changes in line with developments in the wider political and media environments and in the operation of news factors.

KEYWORDS

Foreign newspaper coverage, frame analysis, social construction, Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Introduction

This paper highlights some of the key theoretical arguments and findings that arose from PhD research on Irish 'opinion leader' newspaper coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from July 2000 to July 2004 (O'Regan, 2007). This research involved a combination of descriptive and frame analysis of two national daily newspapers – *The Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent* – and two Sunday newspapers – the *Sunday Independent* and the *Sunday Tribune*. It also involved a contextual analysis of Israeli-Palestinian relations, as well as the politico-cultural and

media environments characterising Ireland. And finally, 20 qualitative interviews were undertaken with key media, political-diplomatic and NGO actors.

The media play pivotal roles in the construction of political and public opinion regarding foreign conflicts (Minear, Scott and Weiss, 1996, pp. 45-6, 69-80; Thompson and Price, 2002, p. 7). Particularly, media coverage constitutes the primary source of information that the public relies upon to frame their understanding of foreign issues (Mowlana, 1997, pp. 39-40; Van Ginneken, 1998, p.15), especially since the majority of people do not have direct knowledge, or personal experience of foreign issues and events (Philo, 1999, pp. 282-4; Seib, 2002, p. 48).

Several studies have focused on the factors explaining media constructions of different foreign conflict situations, as well as their political implications (Allan and Seaton, 1999; Allan and Zelizer, 2004; Arno and Dissanayake, 1984; Bennett and Paletz, 1994; Carruthers, 2000; Entman, 2004; Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Gilboa, 2002; Hallin, 1986; Hammond, 1998; Iyengar and Simon, 1993; Jeffords and Rabinovitz, 1994; Kamalipour and Snow, 2004; Liebes, 1997; Malek, 1997; Mermin, 1999; Miller, 1994; Nohrstedt et al, 2000; Norris, Kern and Just, 2003; Robinson, 2002; Seib, 2005; Thrall, 2000; Zaller and Chiu, 1996).

However, many of the theoretical perspectives that have dominated media studies to date, especially the propaganda, hegemonic and political control perspectives, focus mostly on investigating the extent to which the media buttress the powerful protagonists of politico-military conflicts by transmitting state propaganda to the masses and advancing the case for war. Consequently, this focus relies on a narrow conceptualisation of the role of media in covering foreign conflicts and, therefore, leaves many questions unanswered. Also, most research undertaken to date has disproportionately focused on media in the United States and to a lesser extent, Britain and other core European states.

In response, this study extends the current research agenda in two ways. Firstly, it explicitly focuses on the Irish media context. Secondly, rather than confining its investigation to 'testing' for evidence of the existence of propaganda, state hegemony and political control of the media, this research adopts an approach that explores the media influences exerted by a *range* of context factors. The following section begins this exploration by briefly outlining the political background defining the contemporary Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Politics and Dynamics of the Contemporary Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Historically and contemporaneously, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is structured by deeply embedded political relations of domination, subordination and resistance (Chomsky, 2003, pp. 49-50; Nordstrom and Martin, 1992, pp. 1-12; Sluka, 1992, pp. 27-31). The spirals of political violence that have characterised the conflict to date consist of *both* Israeli state-perpetrated 'structural' and military force violence and Palestinian extra-parliamentary violence (Galtung, 1981, pp. 83-96).

On a wider scale, the conflict has been defined as an ongoing historical contest over land which is itself embedded within competing national and religious identities (Oliver and Steinberg, 1993, pp. 16-7). Generally speaking, both communities construct the conflict as a national liberation struggle and rely on opposing narratives regarding the genuineness of their respective peoples' claims to historic Palestine as their ancestral 'homeland' (Chomsky, 2003, p. 3, pp. 46-7, pp. 82-4). Both communities also advocate 'strong and competing claims about deep historical injustices' (Gamson, 1992, p. 54).

The starting point for the period of this research is July 2000, as this marked the end of the Oslo 'peace process', which had defined Israeli-Palestinian relations throughout most of the 1990s. During the abortive Camp David Summit (11–25 July 2000), the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) Chairman, Yasser Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak failed to reach an agreement on the 'final status issues.' Thereafter, this summit's 'collapse' signified the end of the 'negotiated solution' approach to Israeli-Palestinian relations and heralded in an era of unprecedented political violence.

In late September 2000 a wide campaign of Palestinian 'resistance' against the Israeli occupation began. It took the form of a series of protests that often amounted to a second Palestinian uprising, the so-called *Al Aqsa intifada*. Thereafter, a low intensity and asymmetrical war of attrition developed in the Palestinian territories, resulting in huge Palestinian fatalities (Bishara, 2002, p. 17, 22). Particularly, during the earliest phases of the fighting the recurring media image was that of a 'mighty Israeli Goliath... fighting a stone-throwing Palestinian David' (Bishara, 2002, p. 21).

Within Palestinian perspectives, the *Al Aqsa intifada* was a 'resistance' campaign that aimed to force an end to the Israeli occupation (Bishara, 2002, pp. 160-1; La Guardia, 2001, p. 266; La Guardia, 2003, pp. 273-4; Shalom and Shalom, 2000) and to achieve Palestinian political and territorial rights (Rabbani, 2001, pp. 72-6; Said, 2001, pp. 33-40). It also displayed Palestinian disillusionment with the failures of the 'peace process' to deliver what are regarded as basic perquisites for an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Agha and Malley, 2002; Mitchell, 2001, pp. 6-8).

In February 2001 Ariel Sharon defeated Ehud Barak in the Israeli national elections. Subsequent Sharon-led governments adopted a policy of escalating military repressions against the Palestinian population in order to eliminate 'resistance' (Reinhart, 2002, pp. 191-4). Policies aimed at increasing settlement expansions and halting any 'territorial compromises' were also implemented.

During the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001, the emergence of a globalised 'war on terror' rhetoric enabled the Israeli and American administrations to construct Israel's military re-occupation of the Palestinian territories as part of the 'war on terror' (Malek, 2004, p. 162, 165; Moeller, 2004, p. 65). Simultaneously, Israeli political discourses advanced plans for 'unilateral withdrawal' and the construction of the so-called 'separation barrier' as the most appropriate 'solutions' to the conflict (Reinhart, 2002, pp. 226-32). However, Palestinian political discourses opposed these plans as 'illegal' forms of territorial annexation and 'apartheid' (Shlaim, 2003).

One of the most important developments of this period (July 2000 to July 2004), was the unprecedented and dramatic rise in the level of Israeli violence perpetrated in the Palestinian territories (Sayigh, 2001, p. 56; Selfa, 2000, p. 2). This violence consisted of spirals of assassinations that 'targeted' Palestinian militant leaders, military strikes against Yasser Arafat and the PA infrastructure and wholesale military re-occupations of Palestinian areas (La Guardia, 2003, p. 265). In fact, 'operation defensive shield' (March-April 2002) and 'operation determined path' (June 2002) constituted two of the largest Israeli military raids into West Bank towns, while the regular military strikes undertaken in the Gaza Strip from late 2003 and right up until 'operation rainbow' in May 2004, resulted in devastating Palestinian civilian fatalities and property destruction. Furthermore, during this period Israel imposed a highly severe system of economic and civil repression within the Palestinian territories (Bishara, 2002, pp. 9-13, p.129; Roy, 2001, p. 92; UNSCO, 2001, pp. 2-4).

In terms of international media coverage, the increase in Palestinian militant attacks against Israel from January 2001 onwards is also a highly significant development. From January 2001 to June 2003 a total of 137 'suicide' attacks had been perpetrated against Israeli 'targets' and civilians (PHRMG, 2003). 'Suicide' attacks also continued throughout the first half of 2004. Consequently, this development is likely to enhance the resonance of Israeli 'terrorism' and 'national security' themes within international media discourses. However, in a similar vein, Israel's increased militarisation of the conflict might also be expected to result in increased media coverage of the themes of 'Israeli aggression' and 'Palestinian injustice.'

Significantly, for the purposes of this research, this overall political environment supplies an interesting context for its analysis of Irish 'opinion leader' newspaper coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from July 2000 to July 2004

Irish Newspapers as National Public Sites of Contest between Competing Frames of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Collectively, mass media constitute the 'master forum' of the wider public sphere (Ferree et al, 2002, p. 10). National media outlets are primary mediators of public dialogue and deliberation (Simon and Xenos, 2000). They also play central roles in the construction of national identities and political worldviews (Hutcheson et al, 2004, p. 47; Law, 2001, pp. 300-3), as well as influencing political policy making and public opinion trends (Bosk and Hillgartner, 1988, pp. 58-9, 61-2, 70-1; Dearing and Rogers, 1996, p. 22; Downs, 1972; McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

Frame analysis constitutes one of the most useful methodological approaches to analysing these media roles (D'Haenens and de Lange, 2001, pp. 851-6; Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000, 94). Particularly, it prioritises explorations of the cognitive, interpretive and information-structuring functions of news discourses (Entman, 1993, pp. 52-5; McLeod and Detenber, 1999, pp. 3-4; Pan and Kosicki, 1993, pp. 55-9; Ryan, 1991, pp. 53-4; Tuchman, 1978).

This research adopted a modified version of Gamson and his colleagues' model of media frame analysis (Gamson, 1992; Gamson et al, 1992; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Gamson and Stuart, 1992; Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993). This model assumes

that news consists of socially constructed discourses surrounding recurring issues. These discourses are, to varying degrees, structured by different sets of *interpretive packages*. Therefore, ‘deep’ readings, guided by a *signature matrix*, or list of frame indices, are capable of uncovering the various *frames*, or *symbolic* and *reasoning devices* that ‘package’ news discourses.

Frames are defined as the ‘central organizing principle that holds together and gives coherence and meaning to a diverse array of symbols’ (Gamson et al, 1992, p. 384). They constitute the ‘internal structure’, or thematic ‘core’ of media interpretive packages. In this sense, a news frame ‘deals with the gestalt, or pattern-organizing aspect of meaning... suggesting what is at issue’ (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989, p. 4; Gamson and Stuart, 1992, p. 59). Additionally, *symbolic devices*, including metaphors, exemplars, catch phrases, depictions, visual images, or icons, operate within interpretive packages to ‘suggest how to think about the issue’, while *reasoning* or *argumentative devices* consist of idea elements that ‘justify what should be done about it [i.e. the issue]’ (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989, p. 3).

This study’s *signature matrix* draws on some features of the frame indices identified by Gamson’s (1992) study of American media coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict and Wolfsfeld’s (1997) analysis of Israeli and American media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Thus, Wolfsfeld’s *law and order/terrorism* frame index and *Palestinian injustice/defiance* frame index are included within this study’s *signature matrix* as two ideal types of partisan Israeli and Palestinian positions, respectively. *Law and order/terrorism* frames, which strongly featured in Israeli political discourses during the ‘post-Oslo’ era of Israeli-Palestinian relations from 2000 onwards, are typical defensive state-sponsored frames, intended to rationalise and justify Israeli occupation and military rule (see: Table 1; see also: Wolfsfeld, 1997, p. 146; Wolfsfeld, 2004, p. 112).

	Table 1
Meta Frame	<i>Law and Order/Terrorism</i>
Package	Political Violence/’Palestinian Terrorism’
Frame and Positions	The key issue is the threat posed to Israel by Palestinian violence. The suffering of innocent Israelis is morally reprehensible and completely unjustified.
	Israel’s military force is entirely reactive to Palestinian ‘terrorism.’ Charges that this force is disproportionate and excessive ‘state terror’ are denied. ‘Pre-emptive’ and ‘retaliatory’ strikes are essential to defeat the ‘terrorist threat’ and restore order in the Palestinian territories. Israeli ‘defensive’ violence is also justified retribution for ‘terrorism.’
	Israel is willing to negotiate a just and lasting peace. However, intransigent and uncompromising Palestinians consistently reject Israel’s ‘concessions.’
.	Israel represents the ‘free world’ and ‘liberal democracy’ within the Middle East, but is surrounded by ‘repressive’ and ‘authoritarian’ Arab states. Therefore, Israel is the only natural ally of ‘western’ states that have vital and strategic interests in the Middle East.
Metaphors	Palestinian violence as a ‘time-bomb’, Arafat as ‘Israel’s bin Laden’,

	Israel's fight against terrorism as 'Israel's September 11 th .'
Historical Exemplars	The Arab-Israeli Wars (1947-1949, 1967, 1973), Palestinian 'terrorist' attacks, Palestinian support for Saddam Hussein in 1990, The 'collapse' of the Camp David Summit (July 2000), The 'outbreak' of the second Palestinian <i>intifada</i> (September 2000).
Catchphrases	'No prizes for violence', 'War on terrorism', 'No Palestinian partner for peace.'
Depictions	The PLO as a 'terrorist' organisation, Palestinians as volatile, violent, intransigent, uncompromising, anti-Semitic, hypocritical (i.e. expressing a desire for peace, yet still harbouring intentions to destroy Israel), Arab states as hostile, belligerent or aggressive towards Israel.
Visual Images	The aftermath of 'suicide' bombs, Palestinian protests/demonstrations, masked and/or armed Palestinians, Palestinians burning Israeli/United States' flags.
Roots	The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is caused by the Arab threat to annihilate Israel and/or their refusal to recognise the existence of the state of Israel, Anti-Semitism.
Consequences	Increased Palestinian 'terrorism' and escalations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
Appeals to Principles	'National security', 'counter-terrorism' and anti-insurgency doctrines, Principles of 'law and order.'

Another 'pro-Israeli' frame index which is assumed to be culturally available within Irish public domains is the *Jewish injustice/national homeland* frame index. This frame is distinguished by its construction of Jewish rights in more positive and affirmative ways (see: Table 2).

	Table 2
Meta Frame	<i>Jewish Injustice/National Homeland</i>
Package	Jewish Injustice/Jewish Nationalism
Frame and Positions	The Jewish people have inalienable rights to a national 'homeland' in historic Palestine because of the biblical covenant given by God to the Jewish people and because Jewish people inhabited Palestine over 2,000 years ago.
	The socio-economic and political modernisation of Israel is due to the resources and skills of Jewish immigrants and settlers.
	The legitimacy of the Israeli state stems from the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan. Moreover, since the state's establishment, the Jews have earned absolute entitlements to live within Israel, symbolised by the 'Jewish' character of the state.
	A Jewish state is required in Israel because of the worldwide oppression of Jews and the imperative to prevent any future mass persecution.
	The Palestinian people's refusal to accept the Jewish 'homeland' is anti-

	Semitic.
Metaphors	Masada, Palestinians as the modern-day equivalent of Nazis, Yasser Arafat as the modern-day Hitler.
Historical Exemplars	The Dreyfus Affair, Pogroms against Jewish communities in Eastern Europe and Russia, The Holocaust or Shoah.
Catchphrases	The Jewish people as a ‘people without a land’, Jerusalem as the ‘eternal and indivisible Jewish capital’, ‘Never Again’, Jewish immigration as the ‘ingathering of the exiles.’
Depictions	Israel as the divine and historic ‘homeland’ for all Jewish people and the Palestinian territories as <i>Eretz Israel</i> , Zionism as a ‘national liberation movement’, International, regional and Palestinian oppositions to Israel’s policies as ‘anti-Semitic.’
Visual Images	The Temple Mount/the Western Wall, Jewish ethno-religious iconography, The Swastika and other Shoah-related imagery.
Roots	The roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lie in the anti-Semitism of the Arab states and the Palestinian people. The conflict is a further manifestation of Jewish persecution.
Consequences	Securing the survival of a majority Jewish state in Israel and continuing the illegal occupation of <i>Eretz Israel</i> .
Appeals to Principles	Principles of national self-determination and ‘state protection’, Zionist political philosophy, Biblical references to the Jewish ‘homeland.’

Palestinian injustice/defiance frames are typical ‘challenger’ frames adopted by weaker protagonists engaged in popular insurgencies against established state powers (see: Table 3; see also: Wolfsfeld, 1997, p. 146). These frames argue the case for ending the Israeli occupation, based on Palestinian ‘injustice’ and ‘liberation’ claims, and they featured strongly within Palestinian discourses from the second half of 2000 onwards.

	Table 3
Meta Frame	<i>Palestinian Injustice/Defiance</i>
Package	Palestinian Nationalism
Frame and positions	Palestinians are engaged in a legitimate ‘resistance’, or ‘liberation’ struggle against the ‘injustice’ of Israeli military ‘aggression’ and ‘illegal occupation’ of Palestinian lands.
	Palestinian support for ‘suicide’ attacks demonstrates the desperation and hopelessness of an entire people. ‘Suicide’ attacks are the only means of ‘self-defence’ available to Palestinians, while also constituting a form of religious ‘martyrdom’ and national ‘sacrifice.’
	Israel is the ‘client state’ of the United States and receives enormous monetary support to impose its ‘colonial’ and ‘imperialist’ interests in

	the region, including suppressing Palestinian nationalism and preventing the emergence of an independent Palestinian state.
	The fulfilment of Palestinian national and political rights, epitomised by the future establishment of a 'viable' and 'independent' state is the only basis for a 'just and lasting' settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
	Israeli-Palestinian negotiations need to be conducted within a 'balanced' and 'fair' international framework. This framework contrasts to the United States-led bilateral approach that favours Israel's positions.
Metaphors	Palestinian David against Israeli Goliath, Dome of the Rock and Palestinian flag as nationalistic metaphors, 'Suicide' bombers as revolutionary 'martyrs', Zionism as 'cancer', The Gaza Strip as an 'open air prison', The West Bank as 'apartheid-like Bantustans', or 'Swiss cheese', The Separation Barrier as an 'apartheid wall.'
Historical Exemplars	The Palestinian uprising in 1936, Deir Yassin (during the Arab-Israeli War of 1947-1949), 'Apartheid' in South Africa, The Sabra and Shatila massacres in September 1982, The massacre of Palestinians at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron (February 1994).
Catchphrases	'Day of Rage', 'Allah is great', 'To hell or to Gaza.'
Depictions	The Palestinians as victims fighting for their legitimate national rights, Israel as an illegal occupier, Israelis as colonial settlers and/or imperial racists, who strongly resist fair negotiations with the Palestinians.
Visual Images	Palestinian youths throwing stones at Israeli tanks, Israeli security forces beating Palestinian protestors, Palestinian deaths and casualties that are caused by Israeli military raids, Yasser Arafat 'under siege', Palestinians queuing at Israeli checkpoints, The Separation Barrier between the West Bank and Israel.
Roots	The cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is Israel's illegal and unjust occupation and continued expansion in the Palestinian territories.
Consequences	The 'two-state solution' will be the negotiated outcome of the conflict because Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories is untenable in the long term.
Appeals to Principles	International Human Rights law and UN Resolutions, Principles of national 'self-determination', 'liberation', 'justice' and 'equality.'

Three other frame indices identified by Gamson are also likely to be relevant for this research (Gamson, 1992). Gamson's *dual liberation* frame index, which explicitly acknowledges the claims and rights of 'both sides' (Gamson, 1992, p. 253), is

adopted by this research in a modified way, and is termed the *reconciliation/dual rights* frame index (see: Table 4).

	Table 4
Meta Frame	<i>Reconciliation/Dual Rights</i>
Package	Conflict Management/Resolution
Frame and Positions	A just peace that protects the rights of <i>both</i> Palestinians and Israelis is possible and desirable.
	All political actors must strive to reach a peaceful resolution of the conflict, thereby winning the battle against ‘terrorism.’
	The costs of political violence are so high that all efforts are required to reach agreement through compromises and trust/confidence-building measures.
	Both Israel and the Palestinians must make ‘concessions’ to forge a peace agreement based on equal recognition of the rights of ‘both sides.’
	The biggest threat to peace is the ‘extremists’ on ‘both sides’ and the escalation of violence to levels where it is the <i>only</i> response available to Palestinian militants and the Israeli security forces.
	The ‘international community’ can play an important mediation role in brokering negotiations and providing the socio-economic and political environment required for peace and prosperity.
Metaphors	Dove, Olive branch, Clasped hands.
Historical Exemplars	The signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993, The signing of the Oslo-related agreements (1994 to 1999), The ‘end of Apartheid’ in South Africa, The ‘successes’ of the Northern Ireland ‘peace process.’
Catchphrases	‘There is room for both peoples within the holy land,’ ‘Give peace a chance,’ ‘Working towards peace together,’ ‘Strengthening the middle ground,’ ‘No to ‘extremism’ on both sides,’ ‘Peace brings prosperity,’ ‘Peace equals security,’ ‘Securing the peace of the brave.’
Depictions	The PLO/PA and Israel as ‘negotiating partners’, The PLO/PA as a moderate and reformist political organisation that is willing to recognise Israel’s right to exist in peace and security, Israel as willing to ‘compromise’ with the Palestinians, Israel and the PLO/PA as committed to implementing a ‘just and lasting’ peace that jointly fulfils Israeli and Palestinian human rights.
Visual Images	The handshake between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin on 13 September 1993, ‘Peace ceremonies.’
Roots	The roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lie in the historic situation whereby two peoples with competing, yet equally legitimate claims to

	the same land found themselves locked within recurring conflicts.
Consequences	Both Israelis and Palestinians will eventually live in 'peaceful coexistence', either within the 'two-state' or 'bi-national state' framework.
Appeals to Principles	UN Resolutions calling for a 'just and lasting peace', Principles of conflict management and conflict resolution, Principles of self-determination and equality for all peoples.

This research's *signature matrix* also includes the *nihilistic violence/warring tribes* frame index, loosely based on Gamson's *feuding neighbours* frame index. This is an explicitly non-partisan frame and is characterised by constructions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a 'plague on both your houses' and an irrational 'blood feud' that renders the moral claims of both protagonists irrelevant (see: Table 5; see also: Gamson, 1992, pp. 54-6).

	Table 5
Meta Frame	<i>Nihilistic Violence/Warring Tribes</i>
Package	The key issue is that innocent people from 'both sides' are dying needlessly in vicious, self-perpetuating cycles of violence and inter-communal hatred.
Frame and Positions	The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues because 'both sides' consistently fail to cease their violence towards the 'other' and to reconcile their ethno-religious differences in a civilised and normal way.
	The gulf of hatred between Israelis and Palestinians is so wide and historically intractable that it is unlikely that peace can be achieved.
	Both Israelis and Palestinians are hell-bent on destroying each other. Thus, any attempts to forge a peace agreement are futile and international actors should not become involved as mediators.
	The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a senseless conflict, fuelled by 'tit-for-tat' brutality from 'both sides.' There is no political rationale underlying the conflict.
	Neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians are genuinely committed to peace. Instead, both parties are too pre-occupied with attributing blame and/or seeking retribution for the most recent cycles of violence.
	Both sides are too obsessed with the perceived injustices of history.
	Past peace agreements between Israel and the Palestinians have only been a travesty of peace.
	Moral culpability rests with both sides. Neither side deserves our support or empathy. Neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians have <i>justice</i> on their side. Both sides have foregone any claim to the legitimacy or rightness of their 'cause.'
	It is ironic that such hatred and enmity occurs in the 'holy land.'
Metaphors	Family quarrel, Blood feud, Greek tragedy.
Historical	The Arab-Israeli Wars (1947-1949, 1967, 1973),

Exemplars	Intifada-related violence, Palestinian ‘suicide’ attacks, Historic Israeli invasions of the Palestinian territories and IDF-perpetrated killings of Palestinians.
Catchphrases	‘A Plague on both your houses’, ‘Cycle of violence’, ‘Descent into the abyss’, ‘Tit-for-tat fighting’, ‘Eye-for-an-eye’, ‘Deadlock.’
Depictions	Innocent Israeli and Palestinian civilians as the primary victims, ‘Both sides’ as aggressors, Violence as futile and irrational.
Visual Images	Scenes of human suffering and loss, e.g. grieving relatives at gravesides, Scenes of property destruction caused by Israeli missile strikes or Palestinian ‘suicide’ attacks.
Roots	The cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the dysfunctional relations that exist between Israelis and Palestinians. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is also a symptom of the dysfunctional politics of the Middle East region.
Consequences	It is most likely that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will escalate, resulting in ongoing deteriorations in Israeli-Palestinian relations and increased atrocities by ‘both sides.’ Given the regressive nature of Israeli-Palestinian politics, it is unlikely that a negotiated settlement can be achieved. Instead, the conflict will descend into an all-out-war situation, or even a regional Israeli-Arab confrontation.
Appeals to Principles	Principles of rationality, reasonableness, mutual trust, or sense of compromise and fairness.

This research’s *signature matrix* models its *regional stability/international security* frame index on Gamson’s *strategic interests* frame index. This frame emphasises the *regional* or *international* causes and ramifications of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see: Table 6).

	Table 6
Meta Frame	<i>Regional Stability/International Security</i>
Package	The key issue is the consequences that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has for political stability in the Middle East region and for international relations.
Frame and Positions	The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a strategically significant conflict, as it impacts on the political situation that pertains in the Euro-Mediterranean region and in the arena of international relations.
	The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the ‘core’ political problem of the Middle East region. There is an ever-present danger that the conflict will ‘spill over’ into other Arab countries or the Euro-Mediterranean region.

	The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a 'running sore' of 'East/West' relations and relations between the 'Muslim world' and the 'Christian world.'
	The 'international community' has political, strategic and moral interests in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A 'comprehensive' regional settlement is required to enhance international security.
Metaphors	Time-bomb, Uncontrollable fire.
Historical Exemplars	The Suez Canal Crisis in 1956, Cold War-based divisions, The Arab oil Embargo in 1973, Israel's invasions of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982, Funding by Iran and Syria of Palestinian militant groups, The first Persian Gulf War in 1991, The United States-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.
Catchphrases	'Clash of civilisations', 'Spill-over' effects, 'Regional volatility.'
Depictions	The Israeli-Palestinian conflict as threatening regional peace and the politico-economic security of the international world order, The 'international community' as 'peace' brokers.
Visual Images	Leaders or representatives from the United States, the EU and/or the Arab States engaged in Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy.
Roots	The origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lie in the Arab-Israeli Wars of 1947-1949 and June 1967, while the escalation of the conflict since 2000 is a reflection of the failure of all political parties implement a 'comprehensive' regional peace.
Consequences	If the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not resolved by the intervention of the 'international community', there is an ongoing danger that the conflict would precipitate a regional war. Israel's ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories will also continue to represent a 'threat' to global peace and security because it fuels the growth of 'Islamic fundamentalism' and 'international terrorism.'
Appeals to Principles	Principles of 'international law' and 'global security', Principles related to the 'responsibility' of the 'international community' to 'manage'/'mediate'/'resolve' the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The model of news frame analysis outlined here constitutes one stage of this overall research. The following section outlines the other research stages, as well as the wider methodological framework within which they are situated. It is argued that the integration of different tailor-made research methodologies within an overarching framework facilitates extensive explorations of the range of factors that potentially influence different dimensions of newspaper coverage trends.

Methodological Approach

This study relied on a number of different research methodologies. Firstly, an analysis was undertaken on the context surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Irish political landscape. Secondly, a descriptive analysis was applied to several manifest, or deductive features of newspaper content, including features such as item length, location, prominence and originating source, as well as format and narrative styles and topical trends. Thirdly, qualitative frame analysis was undertaken to explore the 'deep' interpretive elements of news presentations (Altheide, 1996; Cottle et al, 1998, pp. 95-8; Holsti, 1969, pp. 16-8). Finally, a series of qualitative interviews were undertaken with key media, political-diplomatic and NGO actors.

It was decided to confine this research to two national daily newspapers - *The Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent* – and two Sunday newspapers - the *Sunday Independent* and the *Sunday Tribune*. These four newspapers have played 'opinion leader' roles in Irish public and political life and are well positioned within the Irish media market. It is also assumed that they are regularly read by other media and elites in Ireland and thus, can be considered 'master framers who establish the broad contours of public understanding' (Bloch and Lehman-Wilzig, 2002, p. 160).

Same day editions of *The Irish Times*, the *Irish Independent*, the *Sunday Independent* and the *Sunday Tribune* were sampled in randomly stratified ways. A two-week sample of each newspaper's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was constructed for each year of this four-year time interval from July 2000 to July 2004. This sampling procedure was intended to generate representative samples of news coverage and to avoid the over-representation of daily or seasonal variations (Deacon et al, 1999, p. 47; Riffe, Aust and Lacy, 1993, p. 139).

Applying this sampling procedure, 49 editions of each sampled newspaper were selected for analysis. The total sample size consisted of 256 newspaper items, sampled from a total of 196 newspaper editions. The newspaper sections included in the analysis were front page and 'world'/'international' news pages, in addition to commentary, opinion and editorial pages. Each news item was treated as the unit of analysis.

The 20 qualitative interviews undertaken as part of this research were completed during the period of June to October 2004 and during June 2005 and January 2006. This interview participation rate was considered adequate for representing a range of diverse perspectives. The interview questions primarily focused on participants' perceptions of the factors that influenced trends in Irish national newspapers' coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The themes of these interviews were then incorporated into this research as additional 'insider' perspectives that could shed further light on its findings.

The above discussion outlined the methodological approach adopted by this research. In particular, it highlighted the ways in which its integration of a combination of different methodologies is capable of exploring the range of contextual and environmental factors that potentially influenced the sampled newspapers' constructions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from July 2000 to July 2004. The following section focuses on the findings which emerged from this research.

Summary of Research Findings

This section summarises the key findings generated by this research. Firstly, descriptive analysis found that regular coverage was accorded by each newspaper to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though this was sometimes of a non-prominent nature. Most coverage occurred within 'hard' news report formats and was located in the inside or back world news pages. Only miniscule amounts of front page and editorial coverage were accorded to the conflict. Secondly, in terms of topic displays, it was found that the amount of news items covering conflict topics far outnumbered the amount of news items covering peace or international diplomatic topics. Furthermore, the rates of coverage devoted to domestic Israeli or domestic Palestinian topics were the lowest.

A very interesting finding to have emerged from this descriptive analysis was that each newspaper overwhelmingly sourced its news copy from non-indigenous sources, including Israel-based stringer correspondents, UK-based newspapers and international news agencies.

The most significant finding to have emerged from this study's qualitative frame analysis was the finding that divergent rates of access and representation were achieved by partisan Israeli frames and partisan Palestinian frames. This finding demonstrated that these newspapers, to varying degrees, acted as sites of contest for these frames, rather than just propaganda vessels for either frame.

So, while *The Irish Times* (28.9%) and the *Sunday Independent* (25%) tended to be more favourable towards including *law and order/terrorism* frames, just 7.1% of the *Irish Independent* sample and 2.9% of the *Sunday Tribune* sample displayed these partisan Israeli frames. However, 34.7% of the *Sunday Tribune* sample and 16% of the *Irish Independent* sample featured *Palestinian injustice/defiance* frames. On the other hand, *The Irish Times* displayed *Palestinian injustice/defiance* frames less frequently than *law and order/terrorism* frames (13.3% of sample), while *Palestinian injustice/defiance* frames were entirely absent within the *Sunday Independent* sample (see: Figure 1)

Jewish injustice/national homeland frames tended to be the least likely category of frames to feature within the overall newspaper sample. The second least likely category of frames to feature within this sample was *regional stability/international security* frames. The *Sunday Tribune* displayed *regional stability/international security* frames within 8.8% of its news sample. The *Sunday Independent* displayed *regional stability/international security* frames within 6.3% of its sample. However, none of the *Irish Independent* sample displayed *regional stability/international security* frames. Only 1.2% of *The Irish Times* sample displayed *regional stability/international security* frames (see: Figure 1).

Reconciliation/dual rights frames were presented within very small percentages of each newspaper's samples. There was no display of these frames within the *Sunday Independent* sample. Only 4.8% of *The Irish Times* sample and 7.1% of the *Irish Independent* sample displayed *reconciliation/dual rights* frames. However, a

relatively higher rate of representation was achieved by *reconciliation/dual rights* frames within the *Sunday Tribune* sample – namely, 14.5% (see: Figure 1).

Similar low rates of inclusion and display were accorded by the sampled newspapers to *nihilistic violence/warring tribes* frames. Only 5.4% of the *Irish Independent* sample and 4.2% of the *Sunday Independent* sample displayed *nihilistic violence/warring tribes* frames. However, the *Sunday Tribune* and *The Irish Times* did record relatively higher rates of display for *nihilistic violence/warring tribes* frames – 17.4% of the *Sunday Tribune* sample and 13.2% of *The Irish Times* sample displayed *nihilistic violence/warring tribes* frames (see: Figure 1).

Figure 1: Patterns of Frame Displays within News Discourses (July 2000 to July 2004)

Broadly speaking, these findings strongly critique propaganda, hegemonic and political control perspectives which hypothesise that the politically powerful conflict protagonists consistently gain the highest levels of media representation. Instead, it is argued that within contested foreign conflict arenas, the level of representation accorded by international media to competing frames is best viewed as an achieved outcome that changes in line with changes in the surrounding political and media environments.

Having briefly presented some of the key findings of this research, the following section focuses more explicitly on the question of how the history and dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself impact on Irish media coverage trends.

'If it Bleeds, it Leads' – The Impact of the History and Politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on Irish Newspapers' Coverage

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is regarded as possessing an historical and political-diplomatic significance on an international scale. European and American publics remain interested in this conflict and are also familiar with some of its most iconic storylines and ideologically potent images. The geographic proximity of Israel and the Palestinian territories to Europe and the fact that Europe and the United States have strong foreign policy interests in the Middle East, have ensured that this conflict maintains a relatively high level of newsworthiness.

However, it has been argued that international media face unique dilemmas in covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Firstly, the conflict manifests itself in highly 'ambiguous' ways, as one 'where neither side is an absolute victim', but where Palestinian civilians are, nonetheless more easily cast as 'underdogs' (Liebes and Ribak, 1994, p. 109, 114). Secondly, the media are continually faced with the dilemma of how to provide 'impartial' and 'balanced' coverage of a conflict that is inherently asymmetrical, involving a warlike confrontation between the militarily powerful Israeli state and the Palestinian civilian population (Thomas, 2006, p. 11). Thirdly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also constitutes an 'information war', (Taylor, 2002, pp. 314-5), as *both* Israeli and Palestinian protagonists utilise international media as ideological 'battlegrounds' to transmit their versions of 'reality' worldwide (Thomas, 2006, pp. 11-2; Thussu and Freedman, 2003, p. 4; Webster, 2003, p. 57, 65).

Notwithstanding these newsmaking dilemmas, however, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains one of the most mediated conflicts in the world. This trend is confirmed by this research, which found that regular and relatively high levels of reportage were accorded by the sampled newspapers to this conflict. Moreover, the renewed centrality of political conflict and 'war' discourses from July 2000 to July 2004 was also found to have led to increased newspaper displays of conflict topics, at the expense of peace topics. And finally, the contested nature and international visibility of *both* Israeli and Palestinian frames from July 2000 to July 2004 is clearly related to this research's finding that each newspaper tended to display *both* Israeli and Palestinian frames in varied and contested ways, rather than just wholly transmitting propaganda and biased frames.

So, having briefly outlined some of the impacts that the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have on Irish newspaper coverage trends, the following section continues this discussion by focusing on the 'framing' impact of Ireland's politico-cultural context on media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Providing a 'Small' Window on the Middle East – The Impact of the Irish Political Landscape on Irish Newspapers' Coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

This study's analysis of the Irish political landscape identified two factors that might be considered influential in terms of supplying the context within which Irish media cover the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first factor is Ireland's 'small,' 'minor' and 'peripheral' status on the world stage and its relative lack of 'hard' power in foreign arenas. The second factor is its 'post-colonial' condition, as well as its commitment to a policy of military neutrality and non-alignment.

Throughout its history, Ireland's primary foreign concerns have been relatively provincial, concentrated mostly on the Northern Ireland question and on Anglo-Irish relations. Like other small states, Ireland's foreign policy discourses rely on 'multilateral' and 'neutral' worldviews, while Ireland's post-colonial status meant that it lacked any strong historical tradition of autonomous domestic-led foreign policy-making. Instead, it is mostly dependent on British foreign policy perspectives (since the state's foundation in the early 1920s), UN worldviews (since 1955), and/or EU (formerly, EEC) foreign policies (since 1973).

Thus, the sampled newspapers' trend of devoting little commentary and editorial space to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reflects the relative lack of a sustained national indigenous discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition, the sampled newspapers' patterns of sourcing most foreign news copy from non-indigenous sources, and their relative lack of commitment to covering international political-diplomatic topics relevant to this conflict, reflect the relative isolationist, dependent and 'small state' nature of Irish political worldviews.

In terms of the Irish foreign policy context surrounding this research, another significant political factor is Ireland's lack of capacity to play 'hard' roles in Middle Eastern politics, or in the arena of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, Ireland does not have any 'vital' national or domestic interests in Israel and/or the Palestinian territories, nor does it possess any strong historical or contemporary political-diplomatic ties with either Israel, or the Palestinians. It follows that this context restricts the national 'relevance' of media coverage of many dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is, in turn, reflected by the sampled newspapers' trend of only rarely according front page, or editorial coverage to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while neglecting to cover topics associated with domestic Israeli and Palestinian politics.

To conclude, this brief analysis has indicated the potential ways in which Ireland's politico-cultural and foreign policy contexts might impact on trends displayed by Irish newspaper coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, this is not to suggest that media are wholly influenced by context and environmental factors and

devoid of agency, or autonomous capacity. In fact, as the following section illustrates, this research found that media and news factors, such as resource constraints, editorial judgments and news values, also had important *constructivist implications* for newspaper trends.

Media is as Media Does - The Role of Media and News Factors on Irish Newspapers' Coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

In assessing the impact exerted by the Irish national media environment, one of the most important characteristics of that environment is that it consists of a small, English language-based market and its media players have very little international reach and influence outside of the borders of the Irish state. The Irish media market is highly open to imported media products and faces intense competition pressures from British newspaper titles and Anglo-American television products. Furthermore, Irish media players tend to be highly dependent on copy generated by non-Irish media outlets, including international news agencies, British syndicated services and/or foreign stringer correspondents. As already outlined, this trend was confirmed by this research.

A range of more intrinsic news factors also exerted important impacts on the format trends displayed by the sampled newspapers. For instance, editorial judgements on newsworthiness influenced the newspapers' topic selections, while news values, such as drama, conflict, negativity and narrative simplicity, influenced the ways that newspapers devoted much more attention to covering conflict topics. And finally, 'balance' norms ensured that newspapers generally tended to 'balance' their quotes from Israeli political/ 'official' sources with quotes from Palestinian political/'official' sources.

In conclusion, this brief discussion has highlighted the importance of tracing the impact that *both* politico-cultural and media/news factors exert on media coverage of foreign conflicts over time. In particular, this approach has significant advantages vis-à-vis propaganda, hegemonic and political control perspectives whose primary argument is that singular factors, such as propaganda, bias or hegemony, determine newspaper coverage trends, irrespective of context.

Conclusions

This paper summarised some of the key theoretical arguments and findings that arose from PhD research on how four Irish 'opinion leader' newspapers – *The Irish Times*, the *Irish Independent*, the *Sunday Independent* and the *Sunday Tribune* - covered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from July 2000 to July 2004 (O'Regan, 2007).

It was argued that while many studies have already analysed different dimensions of media coverage of foreign conflicts, they have disproportionately focused on media in the United States and to a lesser extent, Britain and other core European states. Also, existing studies tend to espouse a narrow conceptualisation of the role of media and confine their research to 'tests' of the operation of propaganda, state hegemony and political control of the media.

Thus, this study sought to extend the existing research agenda in two ways. Firstly, it focused explicitly on the Irish media context. Secondly, it developed a model of media analysis that proved capable of uncovering and theorising the potential influences exerted by a *range* of politico-cultural and media factors. Both of these objectives were, in turn, facilitated by this research's methodological framework, which integrated different methodologies, including descriptive and qualitative frame analysis of newspaper samples and qualitative interviews with key media, political-diplomatic and NGO actors.

One of the central findings to emerge from this research's frame analysis was that divergent rates of access and representation were achieved by partisan Israeli and Palestinian frames, while very low rates of inclusion were recorded for the other three remaining non-partisan frames. This finding demonstrated that the sampled newspapers were potentially open to different competing frames of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and frequently acted as sites for framing contests. Thus, this finding strongly critiques propaganda, hegemonic and political control perspectives, as they pre-suppose that politically powerful conflict protagonists consistently gain exclusive media representation.

The remainder of this paper then explored the potential news influences exerted by factors emanating from the political environment characterising the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and factors emanating from the Irish political landscape and media environment. In relation to news factors, it was found that editorial judgements and news norms, such as the 'balance' norm, also influenced the sampled newspapers' coverage trends.

In conclusion, this paper's summary of PhD research on four Irish 'opinion leader' newspapers' coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from July 2000 to July 2004, illustrated how this research was based on a framework of media analysis that integrated a number of different research methodologies. These methodologies were specifically designed to explore the over-time influences exerted by different politico-cultural and media factors on the sampled newspapers' coverage trends. Thus, this framework advances the existing research agenda beyond merely investigating the role of states and political elites in setting news agendas and frames.

This research purposely focused on a single area of Irish media's foreign coverage roles. However, its findings could have been further enhanced by incorporating additional cross-comparative analyses of how Irish media's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resembles, or diverges from, their coverage of other foreign conflict situations. Furthermore, while the primary reason for focusing this research on the Irish media context was the fact that there is a current dearth of research on such contexts; going forward, this research would need to be developed further by undertaking cross-comparative analyses of the foreign coverage roles performed by media operating within a range of different national contexts.

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