Original Research Reports

'Well, Our Goal Is to Achieve Sustainable Quiet and Security for Our People': Negotiating Calls for Ceasefires in the Gaza War of 2014 in Mainstream English News Media by Israeli Spokespersons

Rahul Sambaraju [1], Chris McVittie [2]

[1] *Department of Psychology, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom.* **[2]** *Department of Psychology, Sociology, & Education, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, United Kingdom.*

Corresponding Author: Rahul Sambaraju, Department of Psychology, 7 George Square, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Eh8 9JZ, United Kingdom. E-mail: leo.sambaraju@gmail.com

Abstract

In this study, we examined how calls for ceasefires were negotiated by Israeli spokespersons in mainstream English news media during one instance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the Gaza War of 2014. Recent scholarship in peace studies has begun to examine how 'peace' and 'violence' are variously constructed to advance vested positions. We extend this focus through a discursive psychological examination of another ostensibly desirable outcome in conflicts, namely 'ceasefire'. Findings show that the desirability of ceasefires and their negotiation is closely bound to the management of stake and interest by both media persons and Israeli spokespersons. The latter neither explicitly rejected nor accepted calls for ceasefires. Instead, they downgraded ceasefires in favour of other versions of cessation of conflict, framed as 'sustainable peace'. This allowed for the non-acceptance of ceasefires while, paradoxically, justifying ongoing and further military actions in Gaza. Together, these findings point to the relevance of psychological practices of justifying, managing stake, and avoiding seeming committed to violence in talking about conflict and peace. Findings are discussed in relation to research in peace and political psychology, and implications for the ongoing attacks on Gaza.

Keywords

The 'conflict'[1] between Israel and Palestine has been ongoing since 1948 and there have been several efforts to resolve the conflict (Carlill, 2021). At the time of writing this paper (July 2024), Gaza is subject to the severe bombing by Israel. Deaths in Gaza amount to more than 39,000. Since the early days of Israeli bombings and Hamas's attacks, there have been several calls for a ceasefire across the globe. Despite this, the bombings and conflict continue. Israeli leaders have rejected such calls and have instead characterized these calls as inimical to the existence of the Israeli state itself. Rejection of these calls and the ongoing bombing has resulted in widespread accusations that Israel hates Palestinians and wants to dislocate them from the West Bank and Gaza. Rejecting calls for ceasefires can then make it seem that the party is perhaps committed to furthering violence and actively harming those on the other side. In this paper, we focus on an earlier instance of the conflict, the 'Gaza War 2014', where similar calls for repeated ceasefires were made and negotiated by Israeli spokespersons.

---

1) The ongoing genocide in Palestine makes it extremely hard to name the violence in this region as a 'conflict'. For the purposes of this paper that examines violence in 2014, we have chosen to use the term 'conflict'.

While social, political, and peace psychologists have considered aspects of conflict and peace, examining how calls for ceasefires are negotiated is missing. In studying these issues social and political psychologists have increasingly examined political and media discourses around conflict and peace to identify practices in the apparatus of justification that accompanies conflict (Chiluwa, 2021; Gavriely-Nuri, 2014; Gibson, 2018; Mac Ginty & Firchow, 2016).

Researchers note the importance of the construction of conflicts and the closely related processes of legitimation and justification for various activities such as initiating war, delaying cessation of conflict, or achieving peace (Leudar & Nekvapil, 2011). These justifications routinely attribute blame to the other side, while avoiding coming across as actively seeking conflict or wanting to inflict harm on the other side. Researchers have increasingly employed discourse analytic techniques in examining how 'peace', 'conflict', and 'violence' are constructed by actors involved in the conflict (and others) (Gavriely-Nuri, 2010). Bar-Tal, Abutbul-Selinger, and Raviv (2014) argue that this focus is important for intractable conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for the central concern with culpability in the conflict.

In this study, we focus on an as-yet unexamined aspect of conflict discourse, namely 'ceasefires'. While much research has examined constructions of conflict, war, and peace, little has examined the role of ending conflict via 'ceasefires'. Ceasefires refer to the stoppage of violent actions across two or more state or non-state actors (Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs [DPPA], 2022). These may or may not be initiated by parties involved in the conflict and can have various objectives. Ceasefires can also have various conditions attached to them, such as allowing humanitarian aid, exchange of hostages or prisoners, or addressing perceived reasons for the violence. Rejecting cease-fires can then make it seem that the party in the conflict is not committed to peace and/or is actively aiming to harm the other side instead of merely responding to the conditions of conflict. Here then, we examine various constructions of ceasefire and how Israeli spokespersons manage calls for ceasefire made to them by news media persons, over the course of the Gaza War of 2014. Below, we first discuss broad discursive research on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Discourses of Peace and Conflict

Discursive researchers from various perspectives have examined how talk of peace and conflict is flexibly used to negotiate issues of culpability in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Amer, 2017; Gavriely-Nuri, 2008, 2014; McKinlay et al., 2012; Sambaraju & Kirkwood, 2010; Witteborn, 2007). Gavriely-Nuri (2008, 2009, 2010, 2014) has examined a range of issues related to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A major argument is that talk surrounding this conflict works to normalize 'war' and the 'occupation of Palestine'. These are produced and maintained through a variety of, what she calls, following critical discourse analysts, 'discourses', metaphors, and cultural codes. In an examination of Israeli political leaders' speeches between 1982 and 2008, prior to the start of wars, Gavriely-Nuri identifies a discursive phenomenon called 'Peace in the Service of War' (Gavriely-Nuri, 2014). The analysis of such talk shows how leaders would routinely construct the reasons and motives for conflict as about achieving peace. Notably, ongoing military and violent actions were considered necessary to achieve peace. What this shows, is the routine and unquestioned use of talk about peace in legitimizing and rationalizing war effort.

However, McVittie and Sambaraju (2018) show that constructions of peace and violence are bound to vary for participants on various occasions. While these constructions are developed alongside versions of the ongoing conflict, these attend to justifying and legitimating the actions taken by their side. For instance, the authors show that the Israeli Prime Minister, Netanyahu, could construct Israel as acting in the interests of achieving peace, whereas Palestinians were not demonstrably invested in achieving peace. In these studies, the speakers do not address what constitutes peace. Rather speakers orient to the inherent desirability of peace.

While peace may be seen as desirable, negotiations around which party to the conflict has the responsibility to achieve it have notable consequences for implications of culpability. Israeli leaders and spokespersons are treated as responsible for achieving peace more than Palestinian/Hamas leaders and spokespersons (Amer, 2017). Gavriely-Nuri (2010) shows how talk by Israeli spokespersons and leaders in the Israeli Parliament involves an 'idiosyncratic' use of 'peace' since this is routinely bound up with features such as constructing Israel as an exclusively peace-seeking nation. Sambaraju and Kirkwood (2010) similarly show that Israeli spokespersons routinely avowed efforts and objectives towards achieving peace while negotiating concerns over taking military action.

Achieving an end to the conflict is then a significant and sensitive issue as spokespersons for parties in conflict – Israel and Hamas or Palestinian representatives – orient to inabilities in achieving or maintaining peace as reflecting problematic positions. Jaspal and Coyle (2014) show that Palestinian leaders, in ways similar to Israeli leaders, claim 'victim' status for themselves. The authors argue that these claims minimize efforts towards and support for any form of reconciliation. Fenton-Smith (2007) shows that persons with more direct involvement in the conflict, such as the erstwhile Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, were flexibly described either as a 'freedom-fighter' or 'terrorist' in negotiating culpability. For Palestinian leaders (Jaspal & Coyle, 2014) and non-elite persons (Witteborn, 2007) claims to identities of being victims are routinely offered in negotiating culpability for events while legitimizing actions taken up by Palestinians.

McVittie et al. (2011) examined how Hamas spokespersons negotiated their culpability for violence in the conflict. In media news interviews with international English-speaking news agencies, spokespersons reformulated categories ascribed to them, such as that of being 'terrorists' to that of being 'resistance fighters', in minimizing their culpability while ascribing responsibility for the events at hand to the wider international community. Finlay (2018) specifically examines the issue of how Israeli spokespersons were made to account for the civilian causalities in Palestine because of Israeli actions in the Gaza War of 2014. However, findings show that reports of Palestinian causalities were routinely made vague by offering minimal details about such deaths while offering detailed descriptions of deaths in Israel. Billig (2021) offers similar analyses about how UK politicians could flexibly offer precise and round numbers to mask incompetence in handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Finlay (2018) argues that alongside this bias in talking about civilian causalities, speakers offered descriptions of Hamas's actions in ways that foregrounded its culpability for these causalities.

These sets of findings show that descriptions of actors, parties to the conflict, and actions are made in ways to justify violent actions and manage issues of appearing as not committed to peace or actively committed to harming others.

Peace and Conflict as Resources in Negotiating Culpability

Discursive psychological approaches to peace and conflict, however, specifically focus on constructions of events, actions, and actors and their use in negotiating issues of culpability and legitimacy (Gibson, 2011, 2018). Gibson (2011) argues that much research in peace psychology has utilised concepts and methods of traditional (social) psychology, such as that of differentiating between 'facts', 'objects', and 'attitudes' (cf. Potter & Wetherell, 1988). However, he shows how these approaches are problematic since they offer explanations that are rather removed from the concerns and investment (Potter, 1996) of people involved in these situations themselves. Discursive psychologists then focus on how specific versions of events, actions, and agents are constructed as fact, readily observable, and/or contentious by speakers on specific occasions (Demasi, 2019; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996).

However, any one version is bound to be disputed or show vested interests of the speakers in most and particularly in conflict settings (Potter, 1996). Discursive psychologists show that descriptions of the conflict itself are fertile grounds for assigning and negotiating culpability. Lynch and Bogen (1996) show how differences between personal and conventional narratives of conflict are oriented to and resisted by parties to a conflict. In an analysis of the United States Congressional Committee hearings about the Iran-Contra affair in 1987, the authors show that military personnel involved in the case could offer personal narratives in ways to resist the conventional story about the situation in Iran. This allowed for introducing plausible deniability for any wrongdoings. McKenzie (2001) shows that similar ways of undermining standard narratives about conflict can be used to negotiate ascribing blame. Demasi (2023) shows how accountability for initiating conflict can be negotiated by offering varying versions of a broader context, such as the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO], in the current conflict.

Alongside the specific constructions of the conflict, social and political psychologists argue that the routinized aspects of the conflict are available for use by those involved (Bar-Tal, 2000; Bar-Tal et al., 2014). Drawing on arguments by Billig (1996) and others, Bar-Tal et al. (2014) argue that the 'routinisation' and normalization of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict allow for a banal reproduction of the 'realities' of the conflict. The authors argue that this allows for perpetuation of the conflict, through, for instance, support for violence and/or continuation of military activities, with little

PsychOpen GOLD

scope for alternative views about the conflict. Speakers can then draw upon the banality of the conflict as a resource in negotiating and legitimating actions by parties to the conflict (see also: Demasi, 2023).

The above findings show that invested participants can produce various versions of peace, violence, and conflict in negotiating concerns over culpability for problematic outcomes. A key point here then is that what constitutes peace or conflict indeed varies and notably so from versions produced by others (McVittie & Sambaraju, 2018). Peace psychologists have rarely examined issues involved in negotiating ceasefires and managing culpability for achieving ceasefires. In ongoing conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where episodes of violence are recurrent, means of achieving a ceasefire are particularly relevant (Nets-Zehngut & Bar-Tal, 2007). In particular, ceasefires might be considered desirable, similar to 'peace', as these indicate a cessation of violence and further loss of life. It then becomes interesting to examine how calls for ceasefires are negotiated and then accounted for in terms of their acceptance or not.

The Present Study

For the present study, we focus on one episode of conflict between Israel and Palestine referred to as the Gaza War or Operation Protective Edge (BBC, 2014; please see: Milton-Edwards & Farrell 2010, for a detailed history of the conflict). The events in question involve the Gaza War between Israel and Hamas in July-August 2014. Hamas was allegedly involved in the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers. In response, Israel launched missiles initially and subsequently other forms of military action, such as ground invasion in Gaza (BBC, 2014). This escalated into a war that lasted for 50 days between July 8 and August 26, 2014. While both sides claim that their goals were met, about 2500 Palestinians, 64 Israeli soldiers, and 6 Israeli civilians were killed. Scores more were wounded, and several homes were destroyed in Gaza. During this period several ceasefires were proposed and offered by parties involved in the conflict and others. Below is a listing of these (FirstPost, 2014):

1. July 14, the first ceasefire proposal by the Egyptian government.
2. July 16, Hamas and Islamic Jihad announced a truce with several conditions.
3. July 17, the United Nations offered a five-hour humanitarian ceasefire.
4. July 26 another humanitarian ceasefire for 12 hours, extended for 24 hours by Israel, rejected by Hamas.
5. August 1 the United States of America and the United Nations proposed a 72-hour ceasefire starting at 08:00 that day.
6. August 10, Egypt announced another 72-hour ceasefire.
7. August 13, extended to 120 hours.
8. August 19, a ceasefire renewal was violated.
9. August 26, Israel and Hamas accepted a ceasefire until September 16.

The series of proposed ceasefires indicates the failure of earlier ceasefires. In such context, issues of culpability and accountability for achieving and maintaining/revoking ceasefires become relevant. A noteworthy feature of this conflict is that Israel is widely acknowledged as having more resources and capable of stronger military actions than Hamas or Palestine (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010). Indeed, the latter party is routinely reported to fire rockets into Israel that more often than not miss targets and cause minimal damage (Armstrong, 2018). Arguably, this makes relevant issues that Israel as a possibly more dominating party to the conflict might need more restraint, or, is readily open to being charged with excessive violence or further problematic aims regarding Palestine.

More recently, Friedman and Herfroy-Mischler (2020) show that media coverage and forms of blame vary per what is considered as the stronger or weaker party in the conflict (Chiluwa, 2021). They also show that media from the United States are more likely to adopt similar frames for blame as Israel, because of cultural proximity. Amer (2017) shows that media coverage in international newspapers of the conflict routinely foregrounds Israeli agency in achieving a ceasefire while suppressing Palestinian agency in refusing ceasefires (cf. Finlay, 2018). Together these make it particularly relevant to examine how Israeli spokespersons and leaders attend to and manage issues about achieving a ceasefire in one instance of a conflict. Hamas and/or Palestinian spokespersons are likely to be held accountable in a different manner and for different accounts (McKinlay et al., 2012; McVittie et al., 2011) and are therefore being examined elsewhere. Here we focus on how issues of accountability and culpability are salient and managed, using

discursive psychology. Specifically, we ask how Israeli spokespersons orient to and manage issues around accountability for achieving (or not) a ceasefire in the Gaza War of 2014.

Method

Data

The data for this paper are transcripts of media news interviews with those identifiable or recognizable as leaders and/or spokespersons of Israel during a specific episode of conflict between June and August 2014, called the Gaza War of 2014. Using Google's Advanced Search Engine, the following search string was entered – "Israel, Palestine, Gaza, news, interview, transcript" – for the period June 1, 2014 to September 1, 2014. Given that any search is likely to result in a high volume of 'hits', we decided to use only the first 10 pages, which each have 10 hits (100 overall). We employed specific criteria to ensure that the resulting dataset aligns with the research focus. First, hits had to be from news agencies that are widely recognized as of international repute in the English language and cover a range of avowed or implicit political stances: BBC, CNN, Sky News, CBS, Al-Jazeera, FOX News, and others. Second, we identified those hits that involved interviewees who were widely recognised as leaders or spokespersons of Israel: Benjamin Netanyahu, Shimon Peres, Naftali Bennett, and others (who were retrospectively ascertained for their leadership roles in Israel). Third, we ensured that the results were not duplicates and involved both the media person and the Israeli spokesperson in the interview or transcript. This resulted in a mix of transcripts prepared by media agencies (9) and video footage of news interviews (10).

The first set of transcripts was produced by respective news media agencies and is likely to showcase features of readability and editorial polishing for public consumption (Mollin, 2007). The transcripts are dissimilar in form to those routinely used by discursive psychologists, and these constitute social objects in the sense that these are designed to be read and engaged with by members of the public as 'representations' of what transpired in these interviews. In this way, these transcripts constitute a form of data in their own right. The second set of transcripts is an outcome of video transcriptions done by the first author using a minimal version of the Jeffersonian transcription system (Poland, 2001). This was done so that the latter set of transcripts matched the former in form (showing questions and answers) and type (retaining some features of diction).

A range of topics came up in these interviews: the role of Hamas, comments about the international community, the Israeli public, and, of course, ceasefire and possible resolution of the conflict. We coded these transcripts for instances where media persons or Israeli spokespersons explicitly made relevant topics of ceasefire in the immediate conflict. This involved 16 interactions that began with accounting for why ceasefires were chosen and ended with avowals of commitment to longer-lasting peace. Of these 16 we here examine five that showcase the main ways that ceasefires were presented by media persons and oriented to by Israeli spokespersons. Given the notably different political position of Fox News, we decided to include one extract from their transcript.

Analytic Procedure

The data were examined using techniques of discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wiggins, 2017) and rhetorical psychology (Billig, 1996; Gibson, 2012). Discursive psychologists examine discourse as a topic of study in its own right (Potter, 1996). The focus here is on how specific constructions of the conflict, the agents involved, and actions taken up are developed and used. Discursive psychologists argue that the construction of events and actions as readily observable in the world 'out there' are better examined for the social actions accomplished in doing so (Potter, 1996). Versions of conflict, peace, and violence were examined not as attitudes or views of speakers, but as situated constructions developed in ways to manage issues of culpability and accountability (or others) (Gibson, 2012).

For the present study, we were concerned with accountability for accepting or not ceasefires on offer in media news interview settings. We examined practices by which media persons developed ceasefires as warranted or not in treating Israeli spokespersons as accountable for their positions on ceasefires (Montgomery, 2008). As such our concern was on constructions of ceasefires on offer and outcomes achieved in developing these constructions. A specific focus was

on what is involved for Israeli spokespersons in accepting or not ceasefire offers from international/English-language media agencies. This was achieved through interrogating orientations to and management of stake or vested interest in the construction of ceasefires and their acceptance or not (Potter, 1996).

We made use of tools of rhetorical psychology (Billig, 1996; Gibson, 2012) for its emphasis on how specific versions of events, actions, and agents are designed in ways to counter alternative versions. We adopt these analytic notions in examining how speakers develop specific versions of the conflict as readily available for use in attending to and managing concerns over accountability and culpability for achieving a ceasefire in the setting of an ongoing episode of violent conflict, namely the Gaza War of 2014.

Results

In the interactions examined below, Israeli spokespersons are placed in positions where non-acceptance of calls to ceasefires might indicate a commitment to further violence. However, an acceptance of calls to ceasefires on international broadcast news might not be readily offered. Across the data, we did not find any instances where Israeli spokespersons readily accepted or explicitly rejected ceasefire offers. The analysis focused on constructing ceasefires as desirable and negotiating a non-acceptance of calls for ceasefires without explicitly rejecting ceasefires.

Instead, they constructed ceasefires as coming in the way of achieving longer-term peace for Israel (Extracts 1, 2, and 3) and as inimical to Israel and its citizens (Extracts 4 and 5).

Calls to Ceasefires as Interrupting 'Ultimate Goals'

In Extracts 1, 2, 3a, and 3b, media persons recruit international agents external to the conflict as resources in developing ceasefires as warranted and set up responses from Israeli spokespersons about their/Israel's position on ceasefires. Israeli spokespersons neither explicitly reject nor accept ceasefires. Instead, they offer alternative descriptions of events in Israel in ways that downgrade the relevance of a ceasefire in favour of an upgraded 'ultimate goal' of 'sustainable ceasefire/peace'.

Extract 1 comes from the transcript of a news interview with the then Israeli Minister for Economy Naftali Bennett. The interview was conducted by an unnamed media person (IR) for Al-Jazeera and broadcast on July 29, 2014.

Extract 1

Al-Jazeera, July 29, 2014, Interview With Naftali Bennet

1	IR	can I start by asking you the US president the UN security council the UN
2		secretary general are all calling for immediate ceasefire yet right now we
3		seem to be seeing escalation military escalation on the ground are you still
4		prepared to discuss a ceasefire
5	Bennett	well that is Hamas five times uh would not cease their fire again and again
6		Israel stopped firing and Hamas continued firing rockets into Israel .h what
7		we need now is to achieve the ultimate goal which is to live side-by-side
8		peacefully Gaza and Israel but for that to happen Hamas needs to disarm
9		itself from rockets and from uh tunnels terror tunnels

In Extract 1 the IR attributes a call for an 'immediate ceasefire' to agents external to the conflict: 'US president', 'UN Security council', and 'UN Secretary General'. The three-part listing (Jefferson, 1990) of these agents indicates global authority and a common understanding that a ceasefire is perhaps desirable. Moreover, these agents have a stake in the conflict for having intervened in earlier instances and contributed to the peace process. Drawing on these three agents then manages the IR's stake (Potter, 1996) in producing a question that treats Bennett / Israel as accountable for not progressing toward a ceasefire. It does so by suggesting that these references offer a category entitlement to the IR to produce a question with arguable moral implications (Potter, 1996).

However, a qualified description of events ('seem to be'), at Lines 2-3, indicates events contrary to a ceasefire: 'military escalation on the ground' (Line 3). The interviewer attends to possible issues in access to such events – 'seem to be seeing' – again managing their stake in producing a witnessed description of events (Sambaraju & Minescu, 2019). The accessibility however is downgraded with an unspecified 'we' as those who can potentially access these events and the modal 'seem to be' (Palmer, 2001). Further, the specification that violence is taking place 'on the ground' treats it as not merely proposed or planned.

In these ways, the interviewer develops a contrast between the desirability of an 'immediate' ceasefire and its absence. The question to Bennett is less direct about attributing wrong intentions to Israel or its activities and instead, makes salient efforts towards a ceasefire by Israel: 'are you still prepared' (Lines 3-4). Instead citing the ongoing military activity, it indicates doubts about Israel/Bennett's possible interest in working toward a ceasefire.

In response, Bennett does not explicitly reject a ceasefire and instead describes actions of Hamas and Israel in ways to suggest contrasting dispositions towards violence. Bennett then readily indicates that achieving ceasefires is contingent on the actions of the 'other' – Hamas. To Hamas Bennett ascribes repeated violence in a script formulation (Edwards, 1994, 1997): 'Hamas five times uh would not cease their fire again and again' (Line 5) and 'Hamas continued firing' (Line 6). To Israel Bennett ascribes cessation of 'firing' (Line 6), developing the inference that Hamas is disposed to violence against Israel, whereas Israel is more judicious and would stop violence (see also: Demasi, 2023). This then minimizes the relevance of a ceasefire, since only party in the conflict would seemingly abide by it.

In the place of a ceasefire, Bennett offers an alternative outcome as the goal for Israel – 'we need' – which is characterized as 'the ultimate goal' (Line 7). This characterization is suggestive of treating the alternative as for the longer term. The goal is 'to live side-by-side peacefully Gaza and Israel' (Lines 7-8). Again, the characterization of the goal indicates desirability in suggesting co-existence and the absence of violence, notably from Hamas. Bennett then specifies conditions that relate to Hamas and its activities: 'Hamas needs to disarm itself from rockets and from uh tunnels terror tunnels' (Lines 8-9). These conditions are notable for building upon the erstwhile established disposition of Hamas, which is to be violent against Hamas.

In constructing Hamas as the problem in distinction to 'Gaza' Bennett attends to possible stake in merely blaming the other party as problematic (Potter, 1996). What this achieves is not only to justify rejecting a ceasefire with Hamas but also to offer grounds for further violence from Israel to achieve an ostensibly favorable outcome.

Extract 2 comes from a pre-transcribed news interview program for CBS News hosted by Bob Schieffer on July 13, 2014. Schieffer interviewed several persons on this sequentially, but not simultaneously.

Extract 2

CBS July 13, 2014, Bob Schieffer Interviews Benjamin Netanyahu

1	Schieffer	Prime Minister, the UN Security Council of course called for a cease fire
2		yesterday by both sides, I take it that's not going to happen for a while as
3		far as you're concerned?
4	Netanyahu	Well, our goal is to achieve sustainable quiet and security for our people,
5		and we're doing that by degrading Hamas and other terrorist capabilities.
6		I'm not going to say right now how and when that goal will be achieved,
7		whether by diplomatic and military means. But that goal has to be
8		achieved. We need to have quiet restored to our people for a sustainable
9		period of time and not just for five minutes

Schieffer's question at Lines 1-3 treats Netanyahu as directly involved in making decisions about responding to calls for a ceasefire. This is seen in using the address term 'Prime Minister' (Clayman, 2010) and presenting the possibility of a response to a ceasefire as with Netanyahu: 'as far as you're concerned'. Similar to Extract 1, the call for a ceasefire is attributed to 'UN Security Council' in treating the calls as arising from an external source and not the interviewer or the news agency, thus attending to Schieffer's stake in developing talk of ceasefires. Notably Schieffer treats it as normative that the 'UN Security Council' prefers a ceasefire: 'of course called' (Line 1).

In distinction to Bennett, Netanyahu as the Prime Minister is in a position where he can be treated with more accountability for Israeli military actions and authority to limit these actions. Netanyahu addresses this through foregrounding the duties and responsibilities owed by the Israeli government to its citizens: 'sustainable quiet and security for our people' (Line 4). Notably, Netanyahu does not make salient the actions of Hamas or other groups.

The goals articulated are notably different from a ceasefire in how it is framed and what it is constructed to entail: well-being for Israelis and alternative outcomes for Hamas. The description of what is involved – 'degrading Hamas and other terrorist capabilities' (Line 5) – treats violence as arising from Hamas and develops an initial justification for Israeli military actions: 'we're doing that'. Netanyahu then addresses concerns over Israeli actions in the face of these threats.

As the Prime Minister of Israel, Netanyahu's prioritization of Israelis is normatively expected (Potter, 1996). The description of Israel's actions is hearable as taking place within this remit, inclusive of further violence. In the interactional context of responses to calls for a ceasefire, a commitment to further military actions might be problematic. Netanyahu's avowals of achieving these goals then are vague – 'not going to say right now how and when' (Line 6). The vagueness in describing these goals includes the means ('how') and time ('when').

While the inclusion of both 'diplomacy' and 'military' actions indicates the possibility of violence, the mention of an unspecified future when these goals might be achieved eschews the more proximal question of working toward a ceasefire (cf. Nielsen, 2023). These goals are constructed as important in contrast to a ceasefire: 'for a sustainable period of time and not just for five minutes' (Lines 8-9). Netanyahu downgrades ceasefires for their minimal applicability – 'five minutes' – in contrast to 'sustainable quiet'. This allows for preferring the latter goal and justifies actions to achieve it, such as Israel's ongoing military actions ('we're doing that'; Line 5). Netanyahu then manages not to come across as rejecting cessation of violence, while justifying possibilities for further violence, all in the name of an optimistic future for those in Israel.

In Extract 3, Benjamin Netanyahu is repeatedly asked about their position on accepting a ceasefire. Again, Netanyahu's rejection of calls for ceasefires is framed in favour of alternative forms of cessation of violence that benefit Israel: 'sustainable ceasefire'. Notably, the focus here is on Israeli actions in Gaza, and not merely on Hamas. The exchange is longer than others in this paper since Blitzer pursues various possibilities and conditions under which Netanyahu might accept a ceasefire and Netanyahu does not offer a clear position on ceasefires. We have divided this into two parts: Extracts 3a and 3b. In Extract 3a, Netanyahu avoids coming across as ill-disposed to accepting a ceasefire, without however offering an acceptance.

Extract 3a

CNN July 20, 2014, Wolf Blitzer Interviews Benjamin Netanyahu

1	Blitzer	The President, President Obama urged the other day to all of the parties
2		to return to the cease fire that was received in November 2012. Are you
3		accepting his proposal, go back to that cease fire?
4	Netanyahu	I already did, I already did.
5	Blitzer	If Hamas were to say to you right now "We accept the cease fire," would
6		Israel withdraw its forces from Gaza?
7	Netanyahu	That was the Egyptian proposal, which we accepted and they refused.
8	Blitzer	If they accepted now, is it too late?
9	Netanyahu	I don't know, I don't want to speak about it being too late. I think the
10		first thing is cessation of hostilities but then we'd have to --

Blitzer's question is similar to that in Extracts 1 and 2 for bringing up the voice of a party external to the conflict – 'President Obama'. To this voice is ascribed the position of treating a ceasefire offer introduced in November 2012[2] as

---

2) This was offered during the 2012 conflict, according to which Israel would cease all hostilities in Gaza Strip and vice-versa for Palestinian groups. Notably the ceasefire deal involved rescinding any restrictions and/or control over Gaza by Israel.

desirable. In response at Line 4, Netanyahu indicates an earlier acceptance: 'I already did, I already did'. Locating the acceptance in an earlier time treats Blitzer's question as inapplicable (see also Condor, 2006). In the context of discussing ceasefires, Netanyahu's response treats Israel/political leadership as favourably disposed to a ceasefire.

At Lines 5-6, Blitzer then takes-up this disposition seriously and offers as a hypothetical the possibility of Israel/Netanyahu's action on this disposition: 'would Israel withdraw its forces from Gaza'. This however is presented as conditional on Hamas's acceptance of the ceasefire. In doing this, Blitzer can minimize the possible role of Hamas's rejection or violation of ceasefires and treat Netanyahu's response as salient. An acceptance might be heard as endorsing the premise in the question about Hamas's acceptance and treating Netanyahu as going second in his possible acceptance. A rejection of course carries negative implications for Netanyahu's position on ceasefires.

Blitzer also introduces Israel's ongoing military presence in Gaza, without calling it an occupation, which is notably distinct from firing or other forms of violence across borders. The question then places additional responsibility on Netanyahu to respond to his position as acceptance of a ceasefire is tied to specific forms of military activity. Blitzer then treats the reluctance to withdraw Israeli forces from Gaza as a possible reason for a breakdown of ceasefires.

To this, Netanyahu responds by declaring having had accepted this ceasefire proposal, but not those aspects of withdrawal from Gaza. Netanyahu names this offer – 'the Egyptian proposal' (Line 7) – which allows him to avoid going into the specifics of Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Rather, his position is that Israel had accepted the offer while Hamas had rejected it. Blitzer continues to obtain a response from Netanyahu about Israel's current stance on the ceasefire (cf. Nielsen, 2023). To this end, he re-introduces the hypothetical situation where Hamas would accept the ceasefire (Line 8) in the current context ('now'). Here the question includes a tag – 'is it too late?' – which prefers a disagreement (Hayano, 2012; Pomerantz, 1986). Netanyahu is put in a position to agree or disagree, with the possible 'lateness' of Hamas's hypothetical acceptance (Pomerantz, 1986). An agreement would mean that Netanyahu would now have to explain why achieving a ceasefire in the current circumstances is problematic. A disagreement would indicate that Netanyahu is willing to accept a ceasefire, brokered on news media by Blitzer, and possibly include withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

Netanyahu does not offer an explicit acceptance or rejection of assessment. Instead, he initially discounts the implication in Blitzer's question that he has access to relevant knowledge – 'I don't know' (e.g., Edwards, 1997) – and offers a refrain from agreeing that Hamas's acceptance of the ceasefire has come 'too late'. This denial of knowledge works to inoculate Netanyahu's stake (Potter, 2010) since it minimizes the implication that his position is contingent on Hamas's acceptance or rejections. In distancing himself from such positions, Netanyahu suppresses the significance of the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. Instead, he offers possibilities for alternative actions marked as 'first': 'cessation of hostilities' (Line 10). At this point, it is hearable that Netanyahu is presenting a position favourable to ending violence, which allows him to shift the topic to certain conditions as part of a ceasefire. In Extract 3b Netanyahu justifies continued military actions in Gaza as part of efforts to reach a 'sustainable ceasefire'.

At Line 11, Blitzer interrupts Netanyahu's ongoing explication of the matter of Israeli withdrawal from Gaza as tied to 'cessation of hostilities' (Line 11), which was the earlier question at Lines 5-6 (Extract 3a). Netanyahu introduces another constraint in his 'well' prefaced response (Heritage, 2015) to return to the point he was making when interrupted by Blitzer, which is about the 'tunnel business' (Line 12). In doing so Netanyahu indicates that prior to a ceasefire, Israel will continue military actions in dealing with the 'tunnels': 'we're not leaving those tunnels' (Lines 12-13). This of course goes against efforts at ending violence.

Blitzer addresses this aspect of Netanyahu's response, which while specifically is about time, is also hearable as specifying the form of military action that Israel would take in Gaza: 'stay until those tunnels are destroyed' (Line 14). Blitzer's question neither challenges their presence in Gaza nor sets up a further explanation for why these tunnels need to be destroyed. Netanyahu in response treats the destruction of 'tunnels' as an ongoing activity: 'we're doing that right now, as we speak' (Line 15). This temporal indexing of the activity resists giving a time frame. It however is an admission of ongoing military actions. Blitzer orients to this as such and inquires after the length of time for the continued presence of Israeli forces in Gaza at Line 16. The question sets up a description of Israeli military actions in Gaza instead of an account of continued violence.

Extract 3b

CNN July 20, 2014, Wolf Blitzer Interviews Benjamin Netanyahu

11	Blitzer	Would Israel withdraw its forces as part of a cessation of hostilities?
12	Netanyahu	Well, first we'd have to deal with this tunnel business because we're not
13		leaving those tunnels --
14	Blitzer	So, you would stay until those tunnels are destroyed?
15	Netanyahu	We're doing that right now, as we speak.
16	Blitzer	How long is that going to take?
17	Netanyahu	It's being done fairly quickly. But I think the important thing right now is
18		not to begin to put terms, the important thing right now is to end the
19		hostilities, and we get into a situation where we have a sustainable cease
20		fire. That means beginning to discuss the demilitarization of Gaza. Gaza,
21		under all the previous agreements, should have been demilitarized.
22		Instead of being demilitarized it became basically an Iranian-financed
23		and equipped fortress of terror, with thousands and thousands of
24		rockets and other weapons being smuggled and developed in it. That has
25		to stop, those tunnels have to be shut down.

Netanyahu similarly orients to the hearing that this is an admission of possibly prolonged presence of Israel in Gaza ('fairly quickly'; Line 17) and explains why Israeli forces will continue to operate in Gaza. This starts with suppressing the salience of a ceasefire – 'not to being to put terms' (Line 18) – in favor of other outcomes: 'end the hostilities' (Lines 18-19). This latter is offered a favorable status through aligning it with achieving, what is presented as, an upgraded form of ceasefire: 'sustainable ceasefire' (Lines 19-20).

This goal involves imposing conditions on Gaza, instead of conditions on Hamas as in Extracts 1 and 2: 'demilitarization' (Line 20). Netanyahu then engages in justifying this condition, which is framed as part of prior agreements: 'Gaza, under all the previous agreements, should have been demilitarized' (Lines 20-21). The use of extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) – 'all the previous' – treats the demilitarization of Gaza as expected and the current presence of military capacities as violating these agreements. This latter is developed through a three-part list at Lines 23-24, indicating the ready availability of weapons: 'fortress of terror', 'thousands and thousands of rockets', and 'other weapons being smuggled and developed in it'. Netanyahu ascribes the capacity for military action to parties external to the conflict – 'Iranian-financed' – which is notable since for the participants and other audiences it is hearable that the State of Iran is ill-disposed to Israel. These descriptions contrast with the position of Israel, which must manage these acts of aggression. Further, the violation of normative expectations about a demilitarized Gaza is treated as a justification for Israeli operations in Gaza. Of note above is that questions to Netanyahu about commitments to a ceasefire make way for discussions on Israel's ongoing and future violence.

Calls to Ceasefire as Inimical to Israel

In Extracts 4 and 5 Israeli spokespersons developed versions of ceasefires as harming Israel's interests in protecting Israel and its citizens. In doing so the calls for ceasefires are treated as problematic. Extract 4 comes from a transcript of a news interview with Tzipi Hotolevy, who was then an elected member of the Knesset from the Israeli Likud Party, conducted and broadcast by the BBC on July 30, 2014 (the interviewer is unnamed). Hotolvey's response, in contrast to earlier extracts, foregrounds the uncertainty of the future to justify taking violent actions in the present.

First, the interviewer constructs Israeli military actions as severely problematic for having resulted in the deaths of 'many many hundreds now of children' (Line 1) and specifically 'Palestinian children' (Line 1). These categorizations are noteworthy for their disjuncture with conflict, in so far as, the relevance of these categories in descriptions of conflict would indicate severe problems (Jayyusi, 1991; Sacks, 1992). Nevertheless, the interviewer introduces 'the international community' (Line 2) as a relevant stakeholder to make salient these problematic aspects. To this vaguely described 'international community' is ascribed the position of treating Israel as indulging in acts of omission: 'not to

kill civilians'. Again, this latter categorization – 'civilians' – readily stands outside of categories that are normatively expected to be involved in conflict. In doing so, the interviewer indicates that the deaths of such persons are morally dubious. However, the immoral aspect of these deaths is not made explicit.

Extract 4

BBC, July 30, 2014, Interview With Tzipi Hotolevy

1	IR	many many hundreds now of children have died Palestinian children have
2		died there are not many people in the international community who
3		believe now that Israel is doing its very best not to kill civilians in what
4		is the most densely populated part of the world .h many people are
5		and I'd like you to explain to us what the moral line is for Israel now
6		does it stop
7	Hotolevy	okay unfortunately uh as you know there was an Egyptian offer on the
8		table for a ceasefire that Hamas refused to accept time after time Hamas
9		wants to get reward for the fact that shooting on our citizen on our on our
10		children now I wanna say this Israel can sit quietly and peacefully if it
11		were no being Hamas again trying time after time to kidnap children uh I
12		would like to remind you that three children were kidnapped and
13		murdered in the most uh cruel way uh by Hamas a:nd time after time
14		Israel needs to defend itself now no uh proof at the moment uh that the
15		international community's offering us uh an offer that is gonna
16		demilitarize demilitarize Gaza

Instead, the interviewer works to downgrade the immorality of Israel's actions by attributing lesser efforts to Israel in avoiding the killing of 'civilians': 'very best'. Further the characterization of Gaza as 'the most densely populated part of the world', in using the extreme-case formulation, offers a ready explanation for why civilian deaths are hard to avoid (Pomerantz, 1986). In that, Israel is treated as not exercising caution, instead of being accused of directly leading to civilian deaths. What is striking about the question and its development is that the deaths of these children are not treated as an act of terrorism or war crime. Instead, the inference offered is that given the nature of the conflict and Gaza, these deaths are inevitable. Hotolevy is then asked to explain Israeli efforts to stop the conflict.

In response, Hotolevy orients to the moral defensibleness of Israel's actions. She accomplishes this by constructing ceasefires as favouring Hamas and that the conflict is inevitable until Gaza is demilitarized. Hotolevy develops a scripted formulation (Edwards, 1994) of Hamas's rejections of ceasefire offers and, problematically, the positive consequences of this: 'wants to get reward' (Line 9). This latter is explicated by suggesting that Hamas takes advantage of ceasefires to attack Israeli 'citizen[s]' and 'children'. The reference to children echoes the interviewer's question on the deaths of children in Gaza and works to undermine the relevance of the deaths of Palestinian children by giving instances of the deaths of Israeli children.

Second, this is contrasted with a characterization of Israel as innocent and abiding by peace: 'Israel and sit quietly and peacefully' (Line 10). The actions of Hamas are again treated as routine – 'again trying time after time' (Line 11) – and severely problematic: 'kidnap children'. Hotolevy offers one such instance of kidnapping and 'murder' of 'three children' to support her claim. Here the extreme case formulated 'most uh cruel' description of the murder counters possible claims that these were war-time deaths (Pomerantz, 1986).

Third, Hotolevy develops Israel's actions as 'defending' in response to expected acts of aggression from Hamas (cf. Gavriely-Nuri, 2014). It is this situation that Hotolevy treats as a failing of the 'international community' (Line 15). She points to the absence of support from the international community to suppress the capacity of Hamas to continue its normative aggression ('time after time'; Line 13) by demilitarizing Gaza. Hotolevy then offers the 'demilitarization of Gaza' as a means to correct the failures of the international community. What all of this ultimately does is to treat ceasefires as useless in preventing further attacks on Israel and justify warrants for demilitarizing Gaza.

Thus far in the extracts above, media persons recruited sources with authority that are external to the conflict in treating Israeli spokespersons as accountable for not accepting a ceasefire. In distinction, in Extract 5, the authority of external agents is treated as problematic in proposing ceasefires. Sean Hannity of Fox News interviews Benjamin Netanyahu on August 8, 2014.

Extract 5

Fox News, August 8, 2014. Sean Hannity Interviews Benjamin Netanyahu

1	Hannity	So the question is, you see the rise of radicalism You see the rise of anti-
2		died there are not many people in the international community who
3		hear you have got to have a cease-fire. You cannot defend yourself.
4	Netanyahu	Well, I think a lot of people say they support Israel's right to exist, and I
5		think they do. They support Israel's right to defend itself. But they actually,
6		in practice, refuse to let Israel exercise that right because -- I know that's
7		not the U.S. position, and the U.S. has been very clear about that, including
8		from President Obama down. (INAUDIBLE) we cannot (ph) -- no country
9		can tolerate rockets into our cities. Nobody -- no country can tolerate these
10		terror tunnels dug into our communities, and we have a right to act in self-
11		defense, and we do. And I think that's important.

In his question, Hannity introduces the claim that a ceasefire is not so favourable for Israel in ways to treat this as the topic: 'So the question is' (Line 1). This involves descriptions of the ongoing situation for Israel in juxtaposition to external reasons for a ceasefire. In developing a contrast this allows for treating a ceasefire as problematic.

First, Hannity offers a three-part listing (Jefferson, 1990) of what are presented as readily observable phenomena: 'you see the rise of radicalism. You see the rise of anti-Semitism. You read Hamas's charter' (Lines 1-2). The last item is hearable as completing the development of the inference that the ongoing context informed by Hamas's activities is anti-Semitic and radical. The use of the pronoun 'you' is notable for being hearable as directed at Netanyahu/Israel and potentially in generic ways where other agents in this position (as targets) would similarly face issues. Second, Hannity introduces a ceasefire as a call made by unspecified others on Israel: 'you hear you have got to have a cease-fire' (Lines 2-3). While the use of the modal 'got to' treats these ceasefires as broadly desirable outcomes (Palmer, 2001), Hannity offers a problematic outcome of agreeing to a ceasefire: 'you cannot defend yourself' (Line 3). Together these allow for the inference that calls for a ceasefire go against Israeli efforts to protect its citizens in the face of severe threats. Somewhat dangerously, Hannity is suggesting that calls for a ceasefire are anti-Semitic since limiting Israel's efforts to defend itself are perceived as anti-Semitic (Leary, 2024; H.Res 888, 2023).

Netanyahu however does not directly address calls for ceasefires or that these are desirable. Instead, he foregrounds the relevance of agents external to the conflict, like 'the U.S.' (see also Extracts 1, 2, 3, and 4), and their positions about Israel's responses. This is framed in terms of Israel's rights to exist and 'defend itself' (Line 5), which were made salient by Hannity, in ways to suggest what is at stake for Israel's actions and calls for ceasefires. While Netanyahu ascribes good intentions to external agents this is contrasted ('but') with possibilities for action: 'refuse to let Israel exercise that right' (Line 6). This treats the ceasefire and calls for it as problematic for Israel to accept. This works as an apparent concession (Antaki & Wetherell, 1999), where Netanyahu manages his stake in not appearing as merely accusing others as leaving Israel helpless.

The distinction developed here between others' avowals that Israel should be able to exercise their rights and the absence of support 'in practice' (cf. Wetherell et al., 1987) works to treat Israel as alone in its efforts to exercise its rights to exist and defend itself. Netanyahu then undermines the position of those external to the conflict and possibilities for taking their suggestions about ceasefires seriously. However, Netanyahu is careful not to accuse those others of intentional misdirection: 'I think they do' (Lines 4-5). In conjunction, he offers the case of the United States as an exception: 'that's not the U.S. position' (Line 7). The inclusion of this exception works to treat Israel's concerns as

legitimate in so far as these are recognized by at least one nation. It is this construction of the situation that allows for his oncoming claims about how Israel is justified in acting in 'self-defense' at Lines 8-12.

Here, Netanyahu constructs the situation that Israel faces as particularly unfair in ways to legitimize its actions. He offers another three-part listing (Jefferson, 1990): 'no country can tolerate rockets into our cities', 'nobody – no country can tolerate these terror tunnels dug into our communities', and 'we have a right to act in self-defense'. The first two items in the list, through extreme-case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986), develop the current situation as illegitimate not because of the threats but because of the illegitimacy of the expectation to tolerate such threats. Netanyahu generates support for this claim that in practice Israel faces threats that need to be acted upon, in ways that other states might do as well. Calls for ceasefires then are constructed as problematic. The last item completes the inference that Israel is justified in taking action toward defending itself. What this does is to agree with the claim in Hannity's question that ceasefires might pose problems for Israel and are consequently not the most favoured actions, without however being explicit.

Discussion

The above analysis examined how Israeli spokespersons negotiated calls for ceasefire made by media persons from international English-language news agencies while the Gaza War 2014 was taking place. Common to the extracts examined above is the relevance of ceasefires for Israel's future existence. Israeli spokespersons oriented to calls and proposals for ceasefires as salient in terms of Israelis' safe and peaceful existence in the future: either as coming in the way of achieving longer-term peace for Israel or possibly inviting future violence on Israel and its citizens. Instead, positions on these calls were treated as indicative of Israel's commitment to peace or further violence. Israeli spokespersons could make salient that they were not the only party in the conflict and that their efforts at peace involve the actions of Hamas and other agents (international community). Ceasefires were downgraded in favour of other outcomes framed as 'sustained peace'. Doing so allowed Israeli spokespersons to manage possible implications that Israel is committed to violence in Gaza while justifying ongoing violence for an ostensibly better future for Israelis (e.g., Demasi, 2023; Nielsen, 2023).

Previous discursive studies of conflict in news media show that spokespersons might present themselves, their sides, and their actions as in the service of achieving peace (Demasi, 2023; Finlay, 2018; Finlay et al., 2024; McKinlay et al., 2012). In contexts of conflict, efforts to achieve or be committed to 'peace' have a favourable status. In the present case, Israeli spokespersons were placed in positions where they could potentially act in ways to achieve desirable outcomes of stopping violence; non-acceptance then would readily suggest favouring violence in an intractable conflict.

Israeli spokespersons could offer versions of ceasefires either as coming in the way of Israel's longer-term goals of living peacefully with Palestinians without Hamas (Extract 1), achieving a sustained peace (Extract 2), or a sustainable ceasefire (Extract 3). Alternatively, ceasefires were treated as actively harming Israel through versions of ceasefires as favouring Hamas (Extract 4), and ceasefires as inimical to Israel (Extract 5). Israeli spokespersons' descriptions of Hamas, as the other party in the conflict, were an integral part of downgrading ceasefires. They constructed Hamas as committed to violence (Extracts 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5), Hamas as coming in the way of peace with Gaza (Extract 2), and descriptions of the broader context where Hamas expectedly attacks Israel despite ceasefires (Extracts 3, 4, and 5). Israeli spokespersons then treated violence from Hamas as scripted, normative, or routine for them, whereas Israel's violence was retaliatory or in the service of achieving 'sustainable peace' for Israelis. The moral exclusion of Hamas, built through ascriptions of terrorism and indiscriminate violence (Extracts 3b and 4) and radical ideologies (Extract 5) allows for justifying violent actions against them (Opotow, 1990).

The above findings add to the existing literature on social, political, and peace psychology. First, discursive researchers have critiqued peace psychologists for an uncritical use of the more traditional social psychological concerns with 'facts', 'objects', and 'attitudes', instead of examining the construction and use of 'attitudes' or similar constructs (Demasi, 2019; Gibson, 2011; Potter & Wetherell, 1988). Here, we see the utility of using a discursive approach to concerns of peace psychologists: speakers here could treat acceptance, refusal, or avoiding accepting ceasefires as indicative of dispositions to continued violence. While it is odd to conceive of nation-states as having 'dispositions'

(or other mental states), speakers here treated socio-political entities like Israel, Hamas, or the UN Security Council as imbued with agency and capacities to act. This was treated as a rhetorical resource in, for instance treating Hamas as engaging in scripted behaviour which allows for treating future violence as normatively expected (Extracts 1 and 4), proposing actions alternative to ceasefires.

It is striking that these practices rely on the more mundane practices of mobilizing psychological concepts and language in terms of dispositions, intentions, and, aims and goals. (Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996, 2010). Israeli spokespersons oriented to their stake in downgrading ceasefires over continuing military actions. This was accomplished through among other practices references to contextual aspects (Extracts 3 and 5), their role as elected representatives in Israel (Extract 2), examples of participating in ceasefire processes in the past (Extracts 3 and 4), and pointing to the failure of the international community (Extracts 4 and 5).

Second, relatedly the present findings also make salient the role of othering in conflict talk as social and political psychologists note (Gibson, 2018). While it is expected that in talk about conflict, the role of the other parties will be salient (Demasi, 2023), here the 'other' and their role are variously constructed. Alongside Hamas, the role of agencies like the UN Security Council and a vague 'international community' are brought up to explain why ceasefires are futile or inimical to Israel. Social and political psychologists can then gain valuable insights by by analyzing how the 'other' and their role are constructed in negotiating accountability.

Third, the findings offer a compelling argument for studying 'conflict talk' not necessarily only from the perspective of broader international relations or political language use (Smith, 1997), but also the more mundane practices of developing accountability, negotiating blame, and justifying action (Chiluwa, 2021). Talk of political leaders and spokespersons can be examined for how they articulate relations between nations and broader geo-political structures: maintaining favourable positions on allies (Extract 5 for how the US is not blamed) or critiquing those states not seen as allies (Extract 3b on Iran). Again, there is the rejection of the authority of a vaguely described 'international community' in Extract 4, which works to treat Israel as having no choice but to take violent actions (cf. McVittie et al., 2011).

Fourth, previous work has examined discourses of peace and conflict broadly and particularly in the case of the Israel-Palestinian conflict (Amer, 2017; Gavriely-Nuri, 2008; McKinlay et al., 2012; Witteborn, 2007). Israeli spokespersons could manage not accepting ceasefires via proposals for future circumstances where there is no violence or a 'sustained ceasefire'. Problematically, however, this was treated to mean suppressing any military capacity for Hamas/Gazans. This extends earlier findings on constructions and uses of 'Peace in the Service of War' (Gavriely-Nuri, 2014), by showing that for Israeli spokespersons 'sustained peace' meant the absence of military capacity of Hamas or agents in Gaza.

Together, these findings show that talk of ceasefire while expectedly a part of conflict and conflict resolutions (e.g., Chiluwa, 2021), can be an occasion for re-specifying and negotiating other issues involved in the conflict (e.g., McVittie & Sambaraju, 2018). The present talk about ceasefire not only involved specific events and actions around the then ongoing Gaza War of 2014 but was treated as implicating intentions and routine dispositions of Israel or Hamas (or those in Gaza) in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Amer, 2017; Gavriely-Nuri, 2008; Witteborn, 2007).

The interactions examined above took place in English-language international news media. Israeli spokespersons are engaged in the high-stakes articulation of their position in a conflict, where Israel can be held responsible for using excessive violence (Amer, 2017; Friedman & Herfroy-Mischler, 2020). Likely audiences are not only Israeli citizens who might make their support known in elections but are international audiences who are likely to respond in indirect ways, like pressuring their governments or acting in other ways that treat Israel as a 'rogue' nation. Justifications for not accepting ceasefires and/or continued violence then need to be made in ways that manage implications that Israel would continue its attacks or occupation of Gaza. Constructions of Hamas as set on being violent against Israel and its citizens alongside those of 'sustained peace' in various forms then allow for not accepting calls for ceasefires, while avoiding coming across as merely pursuing further violence against Gaza or Palestinians.

Limitations and Conclusions

The data in the present study were taken from one conflict setting: The Gaza War of 2014. Further, these are news interviews conducted by and for audiences in the Anglosphere. Negotiating accountability for audiences through these media appearances is likely to be markedly different from those in non-English settings, such as those in the

wider Middle East and South Asian regions. Future research could perhaps do a comparative examination of how accountability is made salient and negotiated to identify whether similar concerns are mobilized and addressed in other settings where the potential audiences might be construed to have a different relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The study examined how media persons developed a sense of accountability for not accepting or breaching cease-fires and how Israeli spokespersons addressed these. Peace and political psychologists could usefully turn their attention to practices of justifying violence and conflict. The ongoing Israeli bombing of Gaza has been charged as genocide in the International Court of Justice at The Hague. Here again, practices of justifying the charges and defending the scale of bombing and displacement will be central and deserve a rigorous examination.

References

Amer, M. (2017). Critical discourse analysis of war reporting in the international press: The case of the Gaza war of 2008–2009. *Palgrave Communications, 3*(1), Article 13. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-017-0015-2

Antaki, C., & Wetherell, M. (1999). Show concessions. *Discourse Studies, 1*(1), 7–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445699001001002

Armstrong, M. J. (2018). The effectiveness of rocket attacks and defenses in Israel. *Journal of Global Security Studies, 3*(2), 113–132. https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogx028

Bar-Tal, D. (2000). From intractable conflict through conflict resolution to reconciliation: Psychological analysis. *Political Psychology, 21*(2), 351–365. https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00192

Bar-Tal, D., Abutbul-Selinger, G., & Raviv, A. (2014). The culture of conflict and its routinisation. In P. Nesbitt-Larking, C. Kinnvall, T. Capelos, & H. Dekker (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of global political psychology* (pp. 369–387). Palgrave Macmillan.

Billig, M. (1996). *Arguing and thinking: A rhetorical approach to social psychology* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Billig, M. (2021). Rhetorical uses of precise numbers and semi-magical round numbers in political discourse about COVID-19: Examples from the government of the United Kingdom. *Discourse & Society, 32*(5), 542–558. https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265211013115

British Broadcasting Corporation. (2014, September 27). *Gaza crisis: Toll of operations in Gaza.* https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28439404

Carlill, B. (2021). *The challenges of resolving the Israeli–Palestinian dispute: An impossible peace?* Springer International. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63185-7

Chiluwa, I. (2021). *Discourse and conflict: Analysing text and talk of conflict, hate and peace-building.* Springer Nature.

Clayman, S. E. (2010). Address terms in the service of other actions: The case of news interview talk. *Discourse & Communication, 4*(2), 161–183. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481310364330

Condor, S. (2006). Temporality and collectivity: Diversity, history and the rhetorical construction of national entitativity. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 45*(4), 657–682. https://doi.org/10.1348/014466605X82341

Demasi, M. A. (2019). Facts as social action in political debates about the European Union. *Political Psychology, 40*(1), 3–20. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12496

Demasi, M. A. (2023). Accountability in the Russo-Ukrainian war: Vladimir Putin versus NATO. *Peace and Conflict, 29*(3), 257–265. https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000653

Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, United Nations. (2022). *Guidance on mediation of ceasefires.* https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2022/11/ceasefire-guidance-2022-0.pdf

Edwards, D. (1994). Script formulations: An analysis of event descriptions in conversation. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 13*(3), 211–247. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X94133001

Edwards, D. (1997). *Discourse and cognition.* SAGE.

Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive psychology*. SAGE.

Fenton–Smith, B. (2007). Diplomatic condolences: Ideological positioning in the death of Yasser Arafat. *Discourse & Society, 18*(6), 697–718. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926507082192

Finlay, W. M. L. (2018). Language and civilian deaths: Denying responsibility for casualties in the Gaza conflict 2014. *Political Psychology, 39*(3), 595–609. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12426

Finlay, W. M. L., Cattier, J., Donois, K., Goodings, L., Kaminskiy, E., Owen, C., Storey, L., & Swami, V. (2024). Norms concerning the recognition of victimhood in postconflict societies: An analysis of "whatabouteries" in online sectarian arguments. *Political Psychology*. Advance online publication.

FirstPost. (2014, August 27). *50 days of Gaza War: Timeline of the Israel-Palestine conflict.*
https://www.firstpost.com/world/50-days-of-gaza-war-timeline-of-the-israel-palestine-conflict-1681619.html

Friedman, E., & Herfroy-Mischler, A. (2020). The media framing of blame agency in asymmetric conflict: Who is blaming whom for the 2014 Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations failure? *Journalism Studies, 21*(13), 1873–1892.
https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1797526

Gavriely-Nuri, D. (2008). The 'metaphorical annihilation' of the Second Lebanon War (2006) from the Israeli political discourse. *Discourse & Society, 19*(1), 5–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926507083685

Gavriely-Nuri, D. (2009). Friendly fire: War-normalizing metaphors in the Israeli political discourse. *Journal of Peace Education, 6*(2), 153–169. https://doi.org/10.1080/17400200903090252

Gavriely-Nuri, D. (2010). The idiosyncratic language of Israeli 'peace': A cultural approach to critical discourse analysis (CCDA). *Discourse & Society, 21*(5), 565–585. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926510375934

Gavriely-Nuri, D. (2014). 'Talking peace – Going to war'. *Critical Discourse Studies, 11*(1), 1–18.
https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2013.835979

Gibson, S. (2011). Social psychology, war and peace: Towards a critical discursive peace psychology. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 5*(5), 239–250. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00348.x

Gibson, S. (2012). 'I'm not a war monger but…' Discourse analysis and social psychological peace research. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 22*(2), 159–173. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.1099

Gibson, S. (2018). Discursive psychology and peace psychology. In S. Gibson (Ed.), *Discourse, peace, and conflict: Discursive psychology perspectives* (pp. 1-28). Springer.

Hayano, K. (2012). Question design in conversation. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 395–414). John Wiley & Sons. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118325001.ch19

Heritage, J. (2015). Well-prefaced turns in English conversation: A conversation analytic perspective. *Journal of Pragmatics, 88*, 88–104. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2015.08.008

H.Res.888. (2023). *Text for H.Res.888 - 118th Congress (2023-2024): Reaffirming the State of Israel's right to exist.*
https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/118/hres888/summary

Jaspal, R., & Coyle, A. (2014). Threat, victimhood, and peace: Debating the 2011 Palestinian UN state membership bid. *DOMES, 23*(1), 190–214. https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12041

Jayyusi, L. (1991). Values and moral judgement: Communicative praxis as moral order. In G. Button (Ed.), *Ethnomethodology and the human sciences* (pp. 227–251). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511611827.011

Jefferson, G. (1990). List construction as a task and interactional resource. In G. Psathas (Ed.), *Interactional competence* (pp. 63-92). University Press of America.

Leary, J. (2024, January 3). Israel's "right to exist" is a rhetorical trap. *The New Republic.*
https://newrepublic.com/article/177768/israel-right-to-exist-rhetorical-trap

Leudar, I., & Nekvapil, J. (2011). Practical historians and adversaries: 9/11 revisited. *Discourse & Society, 22*(1), 66–85.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926510382840

Lynch, M., & Bogen, D. (1996). *The spectacle of history: Speech, text, and memory at the Iran-Contra hearings.* Duke University Press.

Mac Ginty, R., & Firchow, P. (2016). Top-down and bottom-up narratives of peace and conflict. *Politics, 36*(3), 308–323.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395715622967

McKenzie, K. (2001). Fact and the narratives of war: Produced undecidability in accounts of armed conflict. *Human Studies, 24*, 187–209. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1017543122464

PsychOpen GOLD

McKinlay, A., McVittie, C., & Sambaraju, R. (2012). 'This is ordinary behaviour': Categorization and culpability in Hamas leaders' accounts of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 51*(4), 534–550. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.2011.02021.x

McVittie, C., & Sambaraju, R. (2018). Constructing peace and violence in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. In S. Gibson (Eds.), *Discourse, peace, and conflict* (pp. 101-118). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99094-1_6

McVittie, C., Sambaraju, R., & McKinlay, A. (2011). "There will only be lots of chit-chat": How Hamas leaders and media interviewers handle controversial topics. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 44*(1), 92–105. https://doi.org/10.1080/08351813.2011.546057

Mollin, S. (2007). The Hansard hazard: Gauging the accuracy of British parliamentary transcripts. *Corpora, 2*(2), 187–210. https://doi.org/10.3366/cor.2007.2.2.187

Montgomery, M. (2008). The discourse of the broadcast news interview: A typology. *Journalism Studies, 9*(2), 260–277. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700701848303

Milton-Edwards, B., & Farrell, S. (2010). *Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement.* Polity Press.

Nets-Zehngut, R., & Bar-Tal, D. (2007). The intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict and possible pathways to peace. In J. Kuriansky (Ed.), *Psychotherapy in a turmoil region: Reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis from a psychological perspective* (pp. 3–13). Praeger.

Nielsen, S. B. (2023). "There is new technology here that can perform miracles": The discursive psychology of technological optimism in climate change policy debates. *Journal of Language and Politics, 22*(6), 826–845. https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.23035.nie

Opotow, S. (1990). Moral exclusion and injustice: An introduction. *The Journal of Social Issues, 46*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1990.tb00268.x

Palmer, F. R. (2001). *Mood and modality* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139167178

Poland, B. D. (2001). Transcription quality. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 629-649). SAGE.

Pomerantz, A. (1986). Extreme case formulations: A way of legitimizing claims. *Human Studies, 9*(2–3), 219–229. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00148128

Potter, J. (1996). *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric, and social construction.* SAGE.

Potter, J. (2010). Discursive psychology and the study of naturally occurring talk. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative research* (pp. 187-207). SAGE.

Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1988). Accomplishing attitudes: Fact and evaluation in racist discourse. *Text, 8*(1-2), 51–68. https://doi.org/10.1515/text.1.1988.8.1-2.51

Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on conversation: Volumes I & II* (G. Jefferson, Ed.). Blackwell.

Sambaraju, R., & Minescu, A. (2019). 'I have not witnessed it personally myself, but...': Epistemics in managing talk on racism against immigrants in Ireland. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 49*(2), 398–412. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2539

Smith, D. (1997). Language and discourse in conflict and conflict resolution. *Current Issues in Language and Society, 4*(3), 190–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/13520529709615498

Sambaraju, R., & Kirkwood, S. (2010). 'We represent, here, the interests of the free world': Accountability in Israeli leaders' media talk on the Gaza Crisis (2008-2009). *eSharp, 15*, 133–156. http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_153495_en.pdf

Wetherell, M., Stiven, H., & Potter, J. (1987). Unequal egalitarianism: A preliminary study of discourses concerning gender and employment opportunities. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 26*(1), 59–71. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1987.tb00761.x

Wiggins, S. (2017). *Discursive psychology: Theory, method, and applications.* SAGE.

Witteborn, S. (2007). The expression of Palestinian identity in narratives about personal experiences: Implications for the study of narrative, identity, and social interaction. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 40*(2-3), 145–170. https://doi.org/10.1080/08351810701354581

Appendix – Data Sources

Extract	News agency	Date	Video source / link
1	Al-Jazeera	July 29, 2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=zMoIBR_2YiQ
2	CBS	July 13, 2014	http://www.cbsnews.com/news/face-the-nation-transcripts-july-13-2014-netanyahu-perry-gutierrez/
3	CNN	July 20, 2014	http://edition.cnn.com/2014/07/20/world/meast/mideast-crisis-blitzer-netanyahu-interview/
4	BBC	August 20, 2014	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M44qSf5Rj2k
5	FOX News	August 08, 2014	http://www.foxnews.com/transcript/2014/08/08/exclusive-israeli-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-whats-next-plan-dismantle.html