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# Cascading activation: Bush's 'war on terrorism' and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict

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## Abstract

The study employs the cascading activation model and indexing hypothesis to examine a process by which functional frames compete to reshape ideological frames. I apply the model to the post-9/11 framing struggle over whether Israel was a military ally or strategic liability for Bush's 'war on terrorism'. I argue that when states are involved in international coalition building, news media may undertake an 'international indexing', and American allies can become an important part of the cascade activation process. A president's ability to frame always supersedes other frames sponsors' power to spread frames in the US news media, however. When the President changes his frame, the media follow suit. Formerly problematic Israeli behavior is reframed as facilitating the 'war on terror'.

## Keywords

cascading activation, framing, hegemony, international indexing, media and foreign policy

## Introduction

On 20 September 2001, George W Bush outlined his philosophy for responding to the 9/11 attacks. By winning a 'war on terrorism', Bush would rid the world of international political violence. He declared:

Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.<sup>1</sup>

Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon tried to compare Israel's military incursions into the Palestinian territories with Bush's fight against al Qaeda. The Bush administration, trying

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to build an international coalition, stated that Israel had a right to defend itself but denied that the two conflicts were comparable and criticized Sharon's military strikes.<sup>2</sup>

Bush's war on terrorism achieved 'macro-frame' status in US media after he announced it. No competing frame was available for reporters to rethink the US response to 9/11 (Reese, 2007). Yet as the Bush administration geared up for its war on terrorism, it had to manage international and domestic opinion. Bush faced pressure from a domestic coalition<sup>3</sup> to legitimize Israeli military strikes against the Palestinians, faced pressured from the international community (excluding Israel) to distinguish between the two conflicts, but pursued his own policy toward the conflict. In criticizing Sharon, he framed Israel's military strikes as a liability for his agenda.

The purpose of this study is to examine the role that three US newspapers played in mediating the framing struggle that occurred after 9/11. I employ Entman's (2003) cascading activation model and Bennett's (1990) indexing hypothesis to explain why these papers began to frame Israel as a strategic ally in Bush's 'war on terrorism', despite Bush's initial attempt to distance Israel from his war.

## Framing the war on terrorism

After 9/11, journalism became 'American' journalism (Waisbord, 2002: 206) and was on board with the 'war on terrorism'. CBS's Dan Rather told the world, 'George Bush is the president, he makes decisions, and, you know, as just one American, whenever he wants me to line up, just tell me where' (Kumar, 2006: 58).

As a frame, the war on terrorism is an organizing principle that meaningfully structures the world (Reese, 2001). It has been 'elevated to a macro-framework that comes closer to ideology. That is, political debates take place largely within the boundaries set by the frame with general acceptance of the assumptions built into it' (Reese, 2007: 152). The 'war on terrorism' takes up more ideological space than 'functional' frames that are tied to specific policy advocates because it is a taken-for-granted way to think the world internalized by mainstream politics.

An 'ideological frame' is not static but must be continually reshaped to absorb challenges to its status as the dominant way to think the world (Carragee and Roefs, 2004). In this case, the hegemony of the war on terrorism frame was never under question when reporters covered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but its particular shape was. All frame sponsors accepted that Israel and its conflict with the Palestinians was related to the 'war on terror', but the nature of that relationship was questioned. Was Israel's conflict with the Palestinians the same as Bush's conflict with al Qaeda? Was Israel a military ally in, or a strategic liability, for the 'war on terror'?

The opinion pages of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today* revealed that these questions were aggressively contested. Israeli officials and a domestic coalition urged Bush to consider Israel a military ally in the 'war on terror', situated Arafat and the Palestinians as the equivalent of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, and legitimized military strikes against the Palestinians. European and Arab allies urged Bush to distinguish between terrorism and resistance to occupation.<sup>4</sup>

Frames put forth by these policy advocates operate at the functional level. Functional frames are tied to specific advocates, and reporters are aware of their 'spin' (Reese, 2007).

Like ideological frames, these frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993), but do so within the organizing confines supplied by the macro-frame. The 'war on terrorism' legitimated a worldview in which the cause of America's foreign policy problem was terrorism and the solution a military war against it. Within its borders, policy advocates adopted functional frames to define the Israeli–Palestinian conflict's relationship to Bush's war on terrorism. The pro-Israeli side suggested that the cause of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict was terrorism. The remedy was to militarily attack Palestinian 'terrorists' in pursuit of winning the war on terrorism. Arabs suggested that the cause of the conflict was Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Bush should distinguish between terrorism and resistance and consider Israel's military strikes antithetical to US goals. The administration framed Israeli policies as a liability for its war on terrorism. The remedy was to distance Israel's military incursions from Bush's agenda.

Pro-Israel advocates faced the problem of using a functional frame (Israel is a military ally in a war on terrorism) to undermine Bush's functional frame (Israeli military strikes are a strategic liability for the war on terrorism) to reshape the ideological frame (war on terrorism) and justify Israel's policies in the Palestinian territories. Others faced the challenge to use their functional frame (the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is about occupation, not terrorism) to maintain the content of Bush's functional frame. For Arabs, Bush's need to build an international coalition represented an opportunity to gain leverage in pursuit of Palestinian interests.

Because Bush's war on terrorism was never in question it can be said to have become the hegemonic ideology for thinking about how US policy should be formulated after 9/11. Gramsci called hegemony the 'consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life' by a dominant group (1971: 12). Raymond Williams (1977: 112) added that the hegemonic ideology is not a passive form of domination, but an active one that 'has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified'.

Entman's (2003) cascading activation model and Bennett's (1990) indexing hypothesis can be used to examine a hegemonic process that occurs when functional frames attempt to shape an ideological frame. Although Bush initially rejected the domestic frame, the press eventually considered Israel a military ally in his war on terrorism. What is important here is to understand the press's role in mediating the post-9/11 framing struggle, explain why it adopted some functional frames when it did, and illustrate how functional frames adjusted the shape of the ideological frame.

## **Cascading activation and the US–Israeli relationship**

The cascading activation model acknowledges that the ability to spread frames is stratified across a variety of political actors (Entman, 2003). The administration possesses the most power to spread frames, but elites in Congress and think tanks have the power to spread frames both to the news media and to other officials.

Officials at higher levels of the 'cascade', like the President, have greater power to spread frames to lower-level officials, reporters, and the public. Advocates at lower levels of the cascade require extra energy, 'a pumping mechanism' in the form of cultural resonance, to activate their frames with the news media and higher-level officials (Entman, 2003: 420).

Consistent with the indexing hypothesis, the model predicts that mediated frame competition is most intense when there is an absence of elite consensus about an issue. Conversely, as elite consensus emerges, news organizations reflect that consensus in their reports. Bennett's (1990) hypothesis suggests that how Israel's conflict with the Palestinians is framed in relation to Bush's war on terrorism will vary with the frames articulated by legitimate sponsors. When no consensus exists, there would be disagreement about how to frame the relationship between the two conflicts. When consensus exists, the relational characterization would become uncontested. Indeed, journalists act as 'responsible' members of the establishment when elite consensus exists but question foreign policy when elite conflict emerges (Hallin, 1986).

Frame sponsors are more likely to advance a frame when they have built long-term and routinized relations with the press, when they are seen as legitimate news sources (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Gamson and Ryan, 2005; Ryan and Gamson, 2006), and when they craft a message that resonates with the public, officials, and media (Benford and Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1988; Miller and Riechert, 2001; Pan and Kosicki, 2001; Snow and Benford, 1988).

Frame sponsors who suggested that Israel was a strategic ally in a unified military war against the same enemy – terrorism – included prominent Congressional members from both major parties as well as members of the Bush administration. This would suggest a privileged ability to advance their frame in the news media and possibly up the cascade ladder. The friendly relationship between the USA and Israel together with Palestinian violence against Israeli citizens would suggest that a frame that considered Israel a victim of Palestinian terrorism and a partner in the same war against terror would resonate well with the news media, the public, and possibly Bush.

Israel has long been a strategic asset for the USA in the Middle East (Bennis, 2007; Chomsky, 1999; Pappé, 2004; Reinhart, 2005), is considered the only democracy in the Middle East (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007), and its citizens are said to need protection from the ongoing threat of destruction at the hands of Arabs and Palestinians (Kamalipour, 1997). It holds symbolic value for those who consider Israel the keeper of the Holy Lands (Dunsky, 2008).

US news media tend to report the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in a way that favors an Israeli interpretation and therefore would seem primed to accept the domestic coalition's frame. News media minimize the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories as a central cause of the conflict and omit the US role in sustaining it (Ackerman, 2001; Dunsky, 2008; Philo and Berry, 2004). Instead of a narrative of resistance to occupation, the conflict is re-presented as two religious groups engaged in violence because of their differences (Korn, 2004; Liebes, 1992; Ross, 2003). The cause of the conflict is usually attributed to Palestinian violence. Israelis 'respond' or 'retaliate' to Palestinian terrorism (Ackerman, 2001; Korn, 2004; Noakes and Wilkins, 2002; Pednekar-Magal and Johnson, 2004; Philo and Berry, 2004; Ross, 2003; Zelizer et al., 2002), and reporters repair the narrative when it is challenged by facts on the ground (Handley, 2008).

## Method

I used Nexis to identify all news articles that appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today* in which the word 'Israel' was mentioned within 25 words of the

'war on terrorism' phrase (war on terror, war on terrorism, war against terror, war against terrorism) from 12 September 2001 through December 2007. The news pages were analyzed to examine the degree to which the papers internalized or challenged different sponsors' frames. Stories in which 'Israel' and 'war on terrorism' appeared together coincidentally were not analyzed. This yielded 156 usable articles.

I chose the *Times*, *Post*, and *USA Today* for several reasons. The *Times* and *Post* are two of the most important papers in the USA and help set journalism standards (Tunstall, 1977). They are able to maintain reporters overseas even as other organizations remove their foreign correspondents (Hamilton and Jenner, 2004). Other news organizations are dependent on them for foreign news. Each paper helps set the agenda and shape the frame for other news organizations and is a key means through which officials talk to each other and the public. *USA Today* has the largest daily newspaper circulation in the USA. It is a key means through which frames reach the public.

To decipher which frames emerged in the texts, I analyzed those paragraphs in which the term 'Israel' and the 'war on terrorism' phrases were located, statements made by sources, headlines, and reporters' own words about US strategy in the war on terrorism and its relationship to Israel's conflict with the Palestinians. The most contentious frames that appeared were those that considered Israel's military strikes a 'strategic liability' for the Bush administration or Israel a 'military ally' in the same war. These functional frames were most consequential in determining the ultimate shape of Bush's ideological frame and therefore important to the theoretical concerns of this study.<sup>5</sup>

The first goal of analysis was to assess the contribution each frame made in constructing the relationship between Israel and Bush's war on terrorism.

Examples that indicate that Israel was framed as a strategic liability for Bush include:

The Bush administration warned Israel on Tuesday to withdraw its troops from six reoccupied Palestinian towns 'as soon as possible' or risk deepening a conflict that is straining U.S.–Israeli relations and Arab support for the war on terrorism. (Slavin, 2001, 24 October)

Sharp words exchanged between the U.S. and Israel 'foreshadows the delicate balancing act the administration will have to undertake in the months ahead as it seeks to build support among Arab states for its campaign against terrorism'. (Sipress and Hockstader, 2001b, 7 October)

Examples that indicate that Israel was framed as a military ally in the same war include:

Since the Sept. 11 attacks on New York City and Washington and the suicide bombings in Israel, there have been much more sustained counter-attacks by the United States and Israel. (Lardner, 2002, 7 May)

Bush's comments, especially his use of the word 'homeland' and its connotations to the U.S. war on terrorism, made it clear the Bush administration is firmly on Israel's side. (Kessler, 2003, 7 October)

A second goal of analysis was to look for clues that would indicate which frames the papers challenged, recognized but transmitted, transmitted without qualification, or

internalized, and when. Papers challenged a frame by attributing it to a 'radical' source or questioning its credibility (e.g. 'it is not clear what Israeli incursions have to do with a war on terrorism'). Reporters recognized but transmitted frames when they noted they were 'attempts' to shape Bush's foreign policy rhetoric. Reporters transmitted a frame without qualification when they quoted a source, but did not notice it as an 'attempt' to frame the conflict. (Reporters could still challenge the frame or balance it with another frame by internalizing another frame or quoting another source.) Evidence that a frame was internalized is found in reporters' language. When reporters say that Israeli military incursions are a 'distraction' for the US war on terrorism, they have internalized the frame that Israel is a strategic liability for US goals. I also assessed the relative dominance of a frame by examining which order frames appeared in a story. Typically, the initial frame organized the rest of the story.

To examine the indexing of sources, I provide a chronological analysis to demonstrate what sources were saying when and whether the papers challenged, recognized but transmitted, transmitted without qualification, or internalized the frames those sources sponsored.

## Analysis

### *September 2001 to March 2002: liability for war on terrorism*

Sources immediately accepted the 'war on terrorism' frame. Some Arab states attempted to co-opt it. The papers transmitted the Lebanese argument that to win the war on terrorism, the world 'should start by ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip'. Palestinian resistance 'should not be considered terrorism' (Schneider and Hockstader, 2001, 8 October). The papers challenged more 'radical' Arab frames, however. *USA Today* characterized Hezbollah's claim that Israel and the USA were terrorists as an 'uncompromising message' by a 'militant group' (Valdmanis, 2001, 5 November).

Papers were aware of the 'spin' that Israelis and Palestinians attached to the 'war on terrorism' frame. The *Post* wrote that Yasser Arafat 'tried' to align himself with Bush (Williams, 2001a, 24 September). A reporter observed that Sharon had 'tried' to equate Israel's military strikes against the Palestinians to Bush's war against al Qaeda by comparing Arafat and bin Laden. Quoting White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer, the reporter concluded, 'The situations really are not the same' (Milbank and Hockstader, 2001, 24 October).

Yet, the papers took European and Arab concerns seriously. The Bush administration, Arab allies, and Europe agreed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Bush's war on al Qaeda were not comparable. Bush was forced to contend with potential Arab allies' fear that his war on terrorism would become a 'distraction' to Israeli-Palestinian peace talks (Mufson and Kaufman, 2001, 17 September; Mufson and Sipress, 2001, 2 October).

Consistent with international concerns, Israel's actions were often framed as a strategic liability for Bush. This frame appeared in 29 of this period's 46 stories, and as the initial frame in 24. Sharon's decision to cancel peace talks with the Palestinians 'undermines' the Bush administration's wish 'to push the Israeli-Palestinian conflict out of the spotlight and build Arab support for its war on terrorism' (Williams, 2001a, 24 September). Increased Israeli-Palestinian violence was a 'distraction' to Bush's 'effort to respond to

the attacks in New York and Washington' (Sipress and Hockstader, 2001a, 6 October). Israeli military incursions into the Palestinian territories 'complicate' Bush's 'hopes of coaxing Arab nations into a coalition against terrorism' (Bennett, 2001, 7 October; Kaiser, 2001, 23 October).

By March, the conflict became a strategic problem for 'phase two' of Bush's war on terrorism – the invasion of Iraq. Vice President Dick Cheney needed to bring peace to the Israelis and Palestinians or risk losing Arab allies (Keen, 2002, 11 March). Sharon 'defied' Bush by attacking the Palestinians (Hockstader, 2001, 1 November). Sharon needed to 'cool it for the sake of the international coalition against terrorism' (Erlanger, 2001, 3 November). But, 'It was not clear that Sharon understood Bush's message' (Balz and Woodward, 2002, 30 January). Soon, 'mounting frustration in the Bush administration [grew] about the increasingly harsh measures ordered by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon' against the Palestinians (Sipress, 2002a, 7 March).

There were indications that domestic pressure was beginning to coalesce in an attempt to reframe Israel as a military ally in Bush's war. This frame appeared in 16 stories, and as the initial frame in seven. Congressional members began to argue that there was a discrepancy between Bush's rhetoric in his 20 September 2001 speech and his criticism of Israel (Eggen and DeYoung, 2001, 11 October). An administration official compared Palestinian suicide bombings to the 9/11 airline bombings (Mufson, 2001, 4 December). One reporter claimed that 'terrorist attacks' in Israel 'threatened to open new battlegrounds [in a war on terrorism] from the Palestinian territories' (Sanger, 2001, 17 December). Yet another reporter remained skeptical that Israeli policy was in the US interest: 'It is not clear exactly what some of the most visible Israeli actions [against the Palestinians] have to do with the fight against terrorism' (Williams, 2001b, 21 December).

### *April 2002: no consensus*

Thirty-seven stories appeared in April. The liability frame appeared in 19 stories, and in 10 as the initial frame. The domestic coalition's frame appeared in 17 stories, and their frame emerged first in 10 stories. There was no longer consensus about the relationship between the two conflicts. Although the conflict was 'a separate issue' from the administration's war on terrorism, one reporter predicted that continued Palestinian violence would erode the distinction: Bush's 'six-month struggle to keep its war on terrorism separate from the Palestinian–Israeli conflict may have collapsed this weekend' (Weisman, 2002, 1 April). The *Times* and *Post* published a Sharon speech whose central assertion was that the USA and Israel were in the same struggle, yet continued to qualify it as an 'attempt' to merge the two conflicts: 'Mr. Sharon was clearly seeking to line himself up with the United States in a global fight against terrorism' (Bennett, 2002a, 1 April).

Six Palestinian suicide bombings in six days seemed to push the papers to reconsider the conflict's relationship to Bush's war on terrorism. One article described Bush's 20 September 2001 speech as 'striking in its moral clarity', but had given way 'to a murkier reality in the Middle East'. Administration critics wanted to apply Bush's 'with-us-or-against-us formulation' to Arafat (Balz and Milbank, 2002, 3 April).

The papers noted House Speaker Tom DeLay's attempts to force Bush to give a green light to Israel as an ally in a 'war on terrorism' as well as a letter from neoconservative

commentator William Kristol that urged Bush 'to expand the war on terrorism to include Mr. Arafat'. But Israel continued to be framed as a problem: Bush's war on terrorism continued to be 'undercut by Israeli aggression' (Sanger, 2002b, 4 April).

Whereas international concerns had once been taken seriously, the ability of US allies to frame the relationship between the two conflicts waned in April 2002. The BBC lamented that the USA seemed 'to see Israel's aggressive action as little more than an extension of President Bush's war on terrorism', but a reporter challenged this accusation as coming from a media system that was 'never reluctant to trumpet perceived U.S. failures' (Reid, 2002, 4 April).

Although rifts developed in the administration about the conflict's relationship to Bush's war on terrorism, the Israel-as-liability frame continued to emerge. The administration canceled a military exercise with Israel to avoid being 'seen as pro-Israel while ... considering expanding its war on terrorism to include an attack on Iraq' (Weisman and Moniz, 2002, 5 April). Sharon remained 'defiant', committing 'intransigence' by ignoring administration demands (Keen and Slavin, 2002, 8 April).

The papers continued to report that there was significant pressure on Bush to reframe Israel as a partner in his war. William Kristol and Robert Kagan argued that Bush's 'pressure on Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territory clashed with his own vow to take an uncompromising stand with terrorism after Sept. 11'. Democrats added that the administration 'was undercutting its own stand against terrorism by pressuring Israel and meeting with Arafat'. The administration rejected its critics, replying that 'no foreign policy can survive 535 secretaries of state' (Mitchell, 2002a, 12 April).

Democrats attempted to frame the two conflicts as a single military struggle against terrorism. They drafted a resolution 'that will show Congress's "solidarity with Israel in its fight against terrorism"' (Squitieri, 2002, 11 April). Joseph Lieberman argued, 'the Bush administration has publicly and persistently pressured Israel not to do exactly what we have rightly done to fight the terrorists who struck us on Sept. 11' (Lawrence, 2002, 15 April). John Kerry added that Bush was wrong when he pressured Israel to halt its military campaign against the Palestinians, 'If the United States has a right to respond in Afghanistan to suicide attackers in New York City – and we do – then Israel has a right to respond to suicide bombers in the West Bank' (DeYoung, 2002, 15 April).

The *Times* noted that pressure on Bush to equate the conflicts came from his political base as well as 'neoconservatives like Mr. Kristol to Christian and social conservatives like Mr. [Gary] Bauer, from the free-market conservatives of *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page to the talk radio host Rush Limbaugh' (Mitchell, 2002b, 21 April).

Others continued to consider Israel a liability. A member of the Israel Policy Forum told a reporter, 'efforts to equate the Israeli–Palestinian struggle with the U.S. war on al-Qaeda terrorists hurt U.S. credibility in the Arab world and make it harder to end violence' (Slavin, 2002a, 24 April). The administration continued to frame Israel as a liability. Officials who tried to frame Israel as an ally did so 'over the objection of Bush administration officials, who contend it would further alienate Arab states crucial to the war on terrorism' (Allen and Eilperin, 2002, 26 April).

However, a fracture in the administration surfaced about the conflict's relation to Bush's war. Secretary of State Colin Powell considered Israeli military incursions a liability for

the war on terrorism, but Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld called Israeli aggression 'a legitimate war on terrorism'. Vice President Dick Cheney agreed with Rumsfeld, but stated that overtly backing Israel's aggression against Palestinians was a problem for the administration (Sipress, 2002b, 26 April).

### *May 2002 to December 2002: same conflict?*

Throughout 2002, there was no consensus about how to frame the relationship between the two conflicts. Of 24 stories, evidence for the Israel-as-liability frame was present in 10, emerging first in eight, and Israel-as-ally in 14, emerging first in 11. On 1 May 2002, Egyptian President Mubarak 'criticized Washington ... for allowing Israel to lump the Palestinian struggle to end occupation into the same category as the war on terrorism'. Arab officials hoped 'for some sign from Washington that it realizes that the Palestinian question is not another branch of the war on terrorism' (MacFarquhar, 2002, 1 May).

That day Congress passed resolutions in support of Israel's military strikes in the Palestinian territories. These stated, 'the United States and Israel are now engaged in a common struggle against terrorism' (*The New York Times*, 2002, 3 May). Yet these resolutions were framed as a problem for the administration. Congressional leaders who passed the resolution 'brush[ed] aside White House concerns that lawmakers could undermine Middle East diplomatic efforts' (Eilperin and Allen, 2002, 2 May).

One reporter sensed that Americans internalized the domestic coalition's frame: 'Palestinian suicide bombings and other attacks on civilian Israeli targets appear to have influenced many Americans to see parallels with the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States', adding: 'Despite administration efforts to prevent it, the United States-led war on terrorism has merged with the Middle East's most intractable dispute' (Tyler, 2002, 13 May).

In August, Bush compared the two conflicts. After five Americans were killed by a Palestinian suicide bombing in Jerusalem, Bush stated, 'We're responding by working with our Arab friends and Israel, of course, to track these people down. The war on terror is fought on many fronts' (Bumiller, 2002, 2 August). Whereas reporters had previously noted that Israel 'attempted' to align their military strikes with Bush policies, they began to simply transmit the Israeli view that the two conflicts were part of a single military war against terrorism. Ehud Olmert, mayor of Jerusalem, told a reporter, 'The war against terror is at its height' (Bennett, 2002b, 21 November).

In the build-up to the invasion of Iraq, Israel and the conflict continued to be framed by some policy commentators as a liability for US goals. *Post* reporters transmitted Retired General Brent Scowcroft's comments that the USA needed to calm Israeli-Palestinian violence before turning to Iraq (Milbank, 2002, 18 August). *USA Today* reported, 'Israel's support [for the US invasion of Iraq] has far-reaching implications. It could anger Arabs and stir more anti-Americanism in the Middle East' (Slavin, 2002b, 24 September).

The *Times* finally asked, 'Al Qaeda and Palestinians; Fight Against Terror: Two Conflicts or One?'. It seemed to decide it was the same fight: 'Israelis have clearly fallen victim to terrorism "with a global reach", the scourge that President Bush has pledged to eradicate'. Bush 'appeared to find real equivalence in the two conflicts' (Bennett, 2002c, 29 November).

### *2003: War on terror will solve conflict*

In 2003, Israel was no longer a strategic liability for the administration. Of 23 stories, in only five was the frame was present. This was the initial frame in four stories. Israel was framed as a military ally in 13 stories, and this frame emerged first in 10 stories. ‘Some Bush administration officials have talked about using the war on terrorism and the possible war against Iraq to reshape the Arab world in a way that, they say, would increase stability and make peace with Israel more likely’ (Baker, 2003, 16 January). War was now framed as the solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Israel had emerged as a military ally in a war on terrorism.

Reporters attributed the change to a speech Bush made on 24 June 2002, when he ‘embraced Sharon’s view and made Yasser Arafat’s removal as leader of the Palestinian Authority a condition of future diplomacy’. That speech, one reporter suggested, had been forced by domestic pressure on Bush to merge the two conflicts (Kaiser, 2003, 9 February). Tom DeLay and other critics of the administration were no longer framed as defying Bush, but were now ‘standing up to the president’ when they reminded him not to criticize Israel too harshly (Kiely, 2003, 29 July).

In October, Israel bombed Syria. The bombing was framed as a problem for an administration that was ‘already coping with the unexpectedly violent aftermath to the American-led invasion of Iraq, as well as the flare-up in hostilities between Israel and the Palestinians’ (Jehl, 2003, 6 October). But Bush quickly defended the bombing as part of his war on terrorism: ‘Bush’s comments, especially his use of the word “homeland” and its connotations to the U.S. war on terrorism, made it clear the Bush administration is firmly on Israel’s side’ (Kessler, 2003, 7 October).

### *2004 to 2007: military ally*

Israel was now almost completely reframed as a military ally in Bush’s war on terrorism. Of 26 stories, Israel’s strategic worth appeared in 19 stories, emerging as the initial frame in 18 of those. The ‘liability’ frame appeared in four stories. Between 2004 and 2007, Israeli tactics were no longer a full-on problem for the administration, but merely ‘triggered alarm ... [that] the war on terrorism may enter a deadlier phase’ (Wright, 2004, 23 March). The USA and Israel used the same military tactics and shared the same fears (Bennett, 2004, 15 April). A reporter wrote that ABC’s Dan Harris ‘covered the war on terrorism from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Israel and Iraq after 9/11’ (Johnson, 2005, 19 December). After Israel bombed Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Bush administration ‘appeared to give tacit approval to cripple Hezbollah, casting the widening conflict in the Middle East in terms of a wider war on terrorism’ (Rutenberg, 2006, 17 July). Like Iraq and Afghanistan, Israel had become a military front in the war on terrorism. Instead of withdrawal from the Palestinian territories or diplomacy, the military would defeat terrorism.

## **Discussion**

These data offer cautious and speculative support for the cascading activation model and suggest that during periods of international coalition building, international protagonists

may become a significant agent in the cascading activation process. In this case, reporters undertook an 'international indexing': they not only indexed domestic opinion, but reported the range of debate among nations important to administration goals. Israel was framed as a strategic liability for Bush precisely when his administration was attempting to build an international coalition in support of its war on terrorism and invasion of Iraq. Immediately following 9/11, international concerns outweighed those put forward by the domestic coalition. However, as the papers noticed the emergence of an aggressive domestic campaign to reframe Israeli military strikes, international concerns receded to focus on the framing competition between the Bush administration and the domestic coalition.

Consistent with the cascading model, the papers internalized the domestic coalition's frame only when Bush did, but not before, and legitimized international concerns only when Bush did. When Bush reframed Israel from strategic liability to strategic partner, the papers reframed Israeli military activities from harming to facilitating the USA's war on terrorism.

Although these data show that the press followed Bush's frame and adopted the domestic frame once Bush did so, they cannot tell us whether the domestic coalition convinced Bush to reframe Israel's relationship to his war on terrorism or whether he changed his frame based on facts on the ground. At this point, one can only speculate about why Bush reframed the two conflicts' relationship: the data tell us that the domestic coalition's frame resonated enough with the papers to receive ample attention in the news pages, that it became the papers' preferred way to frame the relationship once Bush adopted it, and that the papers attributed Bush's frame change to the domestic coalition's campaign.

There are several reasons to think that the frame was resonant with the papers. Frame sponsors, in order to advance a frame to the news media, must be perceived as legitimate members of the political community, have routinized relations with the press, and organize meaning in a way that is both empirically credible and possesses a 'narrative fidelity' with a macro-frame (Gamson, 1988; Snow and Benford, 1988).

The domestic coalition possessed every advantage in advancing their frame. First, it was composed of a large swath of the political spectrum, including prominent Democrats, Republicans, and, eventually, members of the Bush administration. Inherently newsworthy, these prominent policymakers could advance their frame both to the press and to the administration, suggesting that Bush came in constant contact with their frame. Second, the frame was empirically plausible. The domestic coalition repeatedly drew parallels between Palestinian violence and the 11 September 2001 attacks: both Israel and the USA were western targets, 9/11 and Palestinian attackers were Arab and/or Muslim, and attackers were suicide bombers – whether they used planes or suicide belts. Ariel Sharon attempted to associate Arafat and the Palestinians with Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, and Democrats replicated his strategy. The cascading model assumes that images of 9/11 are highly resonant with the public, media, and officials (Entman, 2003).

Third, the domestic coalition did not seek to challenge the hegemony of Bush's ideological frame, but only its shape by directly attacking his functional frame. It wanted the press to conflate the two conflicts – not to question Bush's militaristic response but to expand the scope of the 'war on terrorism'. The coalition repeatedly stressed the contradiction it perceived between Bush's 20 September 2001 speech and his criticism of Israel's military strikes against the Palestinians. When Bush reframed Israel as a military ally in

his war on terrorism, the papers no longer quoted or paraphrased the domestic coalition's concern about the 'contradiction'. Instead, Bush was portrayed as more fully committing himself to the war on terror by militarily expanding it. By working within the organizing logic of the ideological frame, the domestic coalition advanced its functional frame.

As the indexing hypothesis predicts, the papers framed Israeli military strikes against the Palestinians as a strategic problem for the Bush administration when a unified country was most focused on a US response, when the administration needed to distance itself from problems that would prevent it from building an international coalition, and when it was most sensitive to international opinion. The press legitimated international concerns when Bush did. When the domestic coalition emerged, however, there was no longer consensus about the relationship between the conflicts, and the framing struggle intensified. When Bush reframed Israel as a military ally a new consensus emerged, the papers followed suit, and formerly problematic strikes became consistent with 'war on terrorism' goals. With this new consensus, the shape of the ideological frame was adjusted, changing the scope of reality it snagged up and organized but not its fundamental character. Whereas Israel was once framed as a strategic problem for Bush's war, the 'war on terrorism' was soon framed as the solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

The competition over the way the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is framed in relation to Bush's war on terrorism suggests the possibility that functional counter-frames can undermine an administration's functional frame to reshape its ideological frame. The cascading activation model and indexing hypothesis can be employed to help researchers understand the process by which functional frames compete against each other to reshape but not destruct an ideological frame. When a large swath of the domestic political community get behind a single frame, and that frame is resonant, it can advance that frame in the elite and popular news media, communicate that frame to the President, and possibly force the President to adjust the contours of his ideological frame, but not abandon it. However, we need more research to empirically establish reasons for frame changes at higher levels of the cascade and whether they are due to pressure from lower-level officials and/or the news media.

## Notes

- 1 <http://www.whitehouse.gov>
- 2 At the time the press was making Bush's criticisms public. The administration not only called for a Palestinian state but called for the end of 'Israeli incursions into Palestinian areas, assassinations of suspected Arab militants and the demolition of Palestinian homes' (Sipress and Hockstader, 2001b, 7 October). 'President Bush delivered a harsh rebuke to Israel today for its deadly military operations against Palestinians in the West Bank, saying that the actions of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government were "not helpful" and suggesting that they went well beyond self-defense' (Sanger, 2002a, 14 March). Bush demanded that Sharon 'withdraw troops from Palestinian areas ... "without delay"' (Keen and Slavin, 2002, 8 April). At one point Ariel Sharon accused Bush of 'appeasing' the Arabs, implying that Bush was the contemporary Neville Chamberlain 'who handed Czechoslovakia to the Nazis at the Munich conference in 1938' (Bennett, 2001, 7 October).
- 3 The 'domestic coalition' included Republican and Democratic Congressional members, neo-conservative commentators, talk radio hosts, pro-Israeli activists, and, eventually, members of Bush's administration.

- 4 Between 12 September 2001 and December 2007, 20 editorials about the conflict's relationship to Bush's war on terrorism appeared, as well as 68 opinion pieces by columnists and guest contributors. The editorial pages typically followed Bush's lead in framing the relationship between the two conflicts, but the opinion pages were contested by those who considered Israel not only a problem but an enemy in a legitimate war on terrorism and those who wanted Bush to legitimize Israeli strikes and who considered Palestine a 'mini Iraq'.
- 5 Other frames include, for example, 'Israel is a terrorist nation', the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is about 'occupation', and 'Palestinians are allies in the war on terror'.

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