Russia: friend, foe or family?
An analysis of Israel’s relation with Russia since 1991

A thesis submitted by
Emma Smit
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Graduate School of Social Sciences
Grand Strategy in the 21st Century
Supervisor: Dr. P.A. van Hooft
Second reader: Dr. L.J.M. Seymour
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ABSTRACT

Since the resumption of diplomatic ties in 1991, Israel’s relation with Russia went from no ties at all to a rather strong relationship with Russia in several domains. At the same time, Israel’s political relationship with the United States has deteriorated. The study has sought to establish 1) whether Israel conducts a hedging strategy, and 2) what have been the main causal factors in Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia since 1991, the time-period hereby being divided in three subsequent cases. The results of the study showed that Israel indeed conducted a hedging strategy in the third phase. It also showed that Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia over the course of the three phases has become more complex. Indeed, where in the first phase only the Russian diaspora in Israel explained Israel’s behavior vis-à-vis Russia, in the second phase two additional variables – Israel’s wish to maintain its nuclear deterrence and ideological proximity – were added. The third phase was a combination of all four variables, including Israel’s hedging behavior. The explanation for the puzzling behavior can thus be explained from several theoretical perspectives. Whereas in some cases specific variables led to specific types of behavior, in most cases Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia was an outcome of an interaction of several of the explanations.¹

¹ The title of this thesis is based on Andrej Kreutz’ book Russia in the Middle East: Friend or Foe? on Russia’s relations with the Arab countries in the Middle East.
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1. INTRODUCTION

A famous quote of late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin goes: “Israel has an important principle: it is only Israel that is responsible for our security.” As much as this belief is illustrated – Israel has one of the most powerful militaries in the world and no doubt exists on its nuclear capabilities – this phrase also captures an important paradox in Israel’s foreign policy: Israel thinks that ultimately it can only rely on itself. History, however, shows that Israel from the onset has looked at others to ensure its security and survival. More specifically, it has looked for a powerful ally or patron (Inbar 1997, 25; Dowty 1999, 7-8).

To comprehend this paradox, it is vital to understand that security and survival are not taken for granted by Israelis: Jews – many of them Holocaust survivors – had to fight for their independence. After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 the small (yet militarily increasingly powerful) state fought at least six wars, and many other armed conflicts against varying coalitions of its neighbors, whose general aim was to annihilate the unrecognized State of Israel (Giles 2002, 1-2).

Little doubt exists that history – both that of the Jewish people as well as that of the State of Israel – has strongly influenced the way Israeli policy makers perceive others and their intentions. Indeed, it seems that there is no state more occupied with its own security than Israel, and the question of how to best ensure its security and (continuing) existence has dominated Israeli (foreign) policy making from the onset (Dowty 1999).

Israel’s stance regarding its security is very clear: it has the right to defend itself and will not refrain from doing so whenever this is deemed necessary (Haaretz 2012). Yet, even though it has shown to prove its military mettle, Israel’s geographical position does not allow for the state to remain independent or neutral. With adversaries on practically all of its borders, Israel is essentially ‘encircled’ by (actual or potential) enemies. This feeling of being encircled has greatly shaped Israel’s sense of perceived security (Brecher 1975, 254-255; Inbar 1996; Dowty 1999, 7). According to Waltz, states, when confronted with threats, can react with internal balancing (“depending on yourself militarily by relying on own capabilities”), external balancing (forming alliances, “relying on the capabilities of allies”) or both (1979, 168). Israel does the latter and actually uses its alliance(s) to preserve or increase

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2 Rabin made this remark in an address to both Houses of Congress in 1976 (Inbar 1997).
3 An overview of these wars is provided in the case studies.
4 In 1979 and 1994 Israel made peace with Egypt and Jordan respectively, but this has not taken away a considerate amount of distrust (WikiLeaks 2009a).
its internal balancing capabilities: its military capabilities and most notably its ‘nuclear deterrence’ (Inbar 1996).

Ever since the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel’s most important ally has been the United States (Walt 1987, 98-103).5 Earlier in the 1960s, Israel had aligned itself with the United States after feeling increasingly insecure about the “continued acquisition of Soviet arms by [its] regional adversaries” (ibid., 95). The implication of this was a complete breakdown of ties between Israel and the USSR from 1967 until the collapse of the latter in 1991 (Katz 2005, 51).

As Israel received a considerable amount of help of the United States, its foreign policy in terms of security and other public goods, for a long time was focused solely on the United States. This continued even after the end of the Cold War, when the USSR collapsed and the United States remained as the sole superpower. Whereas Israel (further) developed ties with other states, including Russia, these were no comparison with the “special relationship” between Israel and the United States (Mearsheimer & Walt 2007).

However, since 2009 remarkable changes in Israel’s relation with the United States on the one hand, and Russia on the other hand, have become visible. Whereas Israel gradually started to develop enhancing ties with Russia already since the early 2000s, the relation strengthened considerably after the formation of a new Israeli government in 2009, when Benjamin Netanyahu became Israel’s prime minister for the second time (Magen & Naumkin 2013). Meanwhile, Israel and the United States experienced deteriorating ties since 2009, as the Obama administration and the Israeli government disagreed heavily on key issues, most notably Iran’s nuclear program and Israel’s settlement policy. This has led to sharp criticism on both sides and deteriorating political ties, up to the point that former US Ambassador to Israel, Daniel Kurtzer, has called them the worst in the history of Israel-US relations (Haaretz 2014a).

Israel’s behavior vis-à-vis both states, especially when compared to each other, can be considered puzzling. Indeed, whereas the United States provides Israel with considerable military and diplomatic assistance, Russia does not provide Israel with any bilateral aid and almost without exception supports the Palestinians in the United Nations. More importantly even, Russia is a strategic ally of Iran and Syria, both avowed enemies of Israel (Katz 2005).

Taking the above into account, the scope of this study is twofold. First, this study seeks to establish whether a causal relation exists between Israel’s behavior vis-à-vis Russia

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5 Israel’s first patron was France, from approximately 1958 until the early years of the 1960s (Heimann 2010).
and the United States, especially since 2009. More specifically, it will seek to establish whether Israel is conducting a so called “hedging strategy”.\textsuperscript{6} This strategy is generally defined as a type of behavior stemming from a desire to diversify its dependencies, and that is conducted in light of an anticipated future threat following a systemic change.

The second aim of this study is to investigate for Israel’s \textit{entire} relationship with Russia,\textsuperscript{7} which factors have been the main causal drivers in Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia. To this end, the following research question has been formulated:

\textbf{To what extent has Israel sought to strengthen ties with Russia since 1991, and what have been the main driving factors?}

In order to answer this research question, several theoretical explanations will be discussed. The total time-period will be divided in three separate phases, and both cross-case analyses as well as within-case analyses will be conducted, to establish an as accurate answer as possible.

\textbf{1.1 Motivation}

The motivation for conducting this study is twofold. The primary scope is to make an academic contribution by trying to explain Israel’s behavior (vis-à-vis Russia) from a theoretical perspective. In order to establish a comprehensive explanation for Israel’s motives in its relationship with Russia, concepts like ‘level-of-analysis’ and the question whether the behavior is security driven or not will be discussed. However, as scholars have already paid a considerable amount of attention to these questions in explaining Israeli behavior (although not necessarily in relation to its ties with Russia, and certainly not since 1991), the real contribution will lie in the answer to the question whether Israel in the last phase is conducting a so called “hedging strategy”. This (security) strategy, on which I will elaborate in the literature review, has not been discussed in relation to Israel thus far.

Were it to be found that Israel in the current phase (and/or in the earlier phases), indeed conducts a hedging strategy, this will have clear policy implications as it indicates a strategic change in Israel’s foreign policy, especially regarding its relation with the United States. Indeed, it would imply that Israel actively seeks to diversify its dependencies as it anticipates harmful consequences following the decline of the United States.

\textsuperscript{6} This definition is based on definitions of Roy (2005) and Goh (2007). A comprehensive discussion of (strategic) hedging follows in the literature review and theory section.

\textsuperscript{7} Israel and Russia resumed ties in 1991.
Considering the current state of both Israel-US and US-Russia relations, that have reached a nadir since the end of the Cold War, Israel’s behavior vis-à-vis Russia may not be without risks. Indeed, while intending to diversify its dependencies by strengthening ties with Russia, Israel could actually unintentionally end up harming its most important relationship along the way. Although this scenario sounds rather speculative, it does illustrate the possible consequences, if it would indeed be found that Israel conducts a hedging strategy.

A less pronounced contribution is related to the second part of the twofold research question, and lies in the creation of a theoretically embedded historical overview of the Israeli-Russian relationship since 1991. Although much has been written on the Israel-Russia relation, this is often done in an a-theoretical manner. Furthermore, it has not included Israel’s relationship with the United States as a causal factor.  

1.2 Outline
This study proceeds as follows. First, in the literature review, previous research and various explanations are discussed. In the subsequent theory chapter these explanations are translated into variables and hypotheses. Following this is the research design, in which the methods and operationalization are set out. After this, the case studies will be conducted, followed by a cross-case and within-case analysis in chapter five. The study will conclude with an evaluation of the main findings and recommendations for future research.

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8 Except for literature on the Cold War, but that is not the time-period under investigation in this study.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relations between states – or interstate relations – have been studied extensively by academics for a long time. Different schools have put forward their own theories on why states seek to establish, strengthen, weaken or dissolve ties with other states. In the case of Israel and Russia, four of such explanations are especially relevant. They can be divided in systemic, systemic-domestic, and domestic level explanations.

2.1 Systemic and systemic-domestic explanations

Within the realist tradition, bilateral relationships are most frequently discussed in the context of alliances or other security-enhancing strategies that states deploy in the international system (Waltz 1979; Walt 1987). While realism consists of many variants, three central tenets that are shared by all of them are that “states are the key actors”, “the international system is anarchic”, and “power is central to political life” (Walt 1997a, 932).9 Kenneth Waltz, the founder of neorealism, contends that the anarchic character of the international system compels states to act as security maximizers in a self-help world (1979, 111).10 When faced with a threat, states can conduct internal balancing or external balancing. Whereas the former refers to maximizing one’s own military and economic capabilities, external balancing refers to creating alliances to counter “the prevailing threat” (ibid., 168; Walt 1987, 17).11 Walt defines alliances as a “formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states” (1987, 12). According to Walt, who developed the balance of threat theory, “an imbalance of threat occurs when the most threatening state ... is significantly more dangerous than the second most threatening state ...” (ibid., 265). He agrees with Waltz that “states ally to balance against threats” (ibid., 5). States are particularly likely to balance against a threatening state that is near, has great aggregate power, many offensive capabilities and whose intentions are perceived as aggressive (ibid., 22-26). Besides balancing states can also opt for bandwagoning when confronted with a threat, in which case they will align themselves with the source of the threat (ibid., 17).

Even in the absence of an imminent threat (such as an aggressive state with many offensive capabilities), states may still experience systemic pressures that they anticipate as

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9 The most important variants of realism are classical, structural or neorealism, and neoclassical realism (Feng & Ruizhang 2006). 'Structural realism' and 'neorealism' will be used interchangeably.
10 Offensive realism, one of the two variants of neorealism, maintains that great powers seek to maximize power instead of security (Mearsheimer 2001).
potentially harmful to state security in a more indirect manner (Tessman 2012). An example is a transformation of the international system’s polarity (for example, from bipolarity to multipolarity). Situations like these are likely to invite other reactions (strategies) that do not necessarily include alliances but other forms of bilateral relation/interstate cooperation.12

One such strategy deployed by states in light of an anticipated threat following a systemic change, is ‘strategic hedging’. This strategy, though subject to slightly differing definitions, essentially refers to a certain type of state behavior stemming from the desire to diversify dependencies (Goh 2007, 830).13 This strategy has mostly been discussed in relation to China’s rise, but also to Europe’s behavior after the Cold War and more generally as a reaction to the relative decline of the system leader.14

Bilateral relationships in the realist context can thus be explained in two ways: alliances are formed to counter imminent or direct threats, whereas other types of bilateral relationships result from strategies that are deployed in light of anticipated future threats (e.g. hedging).

The difference between systemic and systemic-domestic explanations then, is a matter of level-of-analysis and what is sought to be explained. Neorealists like Waltz seek to explain general state behavior and therefore only take the systemic level into account. As Waltz contends: “the theory [of international politics] explains why states similarly placed behave similarly despite their internal differences” (1996, 54). Neoclassical realism on the other hand seeks to explain foreign policy, or, as Waltz describes it: “why states similarly placed in a system behave in different ways” (ibid.; Rose 1988, 146). While also adhering to the primacy of the international structure, neoclassical realism contends that “the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit-level” (Rose 1988, 146). Two such variables are decision-makers’ perceptions and domestic state structure (ibid., 152). Neoclassical realism thus combines a systemic and domestic level explanation.

Taking into account the above, the security driven realist explanations may be particularly useful to explain alliances or otherwise (strong) strategic or military relations.

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12 Schweller (1999, 8-16) has discussed several such strategies in light of the rise of great powers. These include: preventive war; balancing/containment; bandwagoning; binding; engagement; buckpassing/distancing.
13 Other definitions of (strategic) hedging include: “… keeping open more than one strategic option against the possibility of a future security threat” (Roy 2005, 306); “… taking action to ensure against undesirable outcomes, usually by betting on multiple alternative options. … cultivate a middle position that forestalls or avoids to choose one side at the obvious expense of another” (Goh 2007, 825); “… readjust to the changing strategic context in ways that enable [states] to … diversify their dependencies” (Goh 2007, 830).
between states. Furthermore, if these exist, realism will contend that this is due to an imminent or anticipated future threat.

2.2 Domestic explanations

An alternative non security driven explanation interstate relationships can be found on the domestic level in (societal) interest groups. Whereas some of such groups may seek to influence a state’s general foreign policy (Putnam 1988), others may directly affect specific bilateral relations with other states (Shain & Barth 2003). The most obvious example of such an interest group is a diaspora, described by Shain and Barth as “a people with a common origin who reside outside the borders of their ethnic or religious homeland” (ibid., 452).

Shain and Barth state that “diasporas … operate as ethnic lobbies in liberal hostlands, … and are a force in the global economy assisting homelands’ economies”, and that “diasporas are increasingly able to promote transnational ties, to act as bridges or as mediators between their home and host societies … and to transmit the entrepreneurial spirit and skills that their home countries so sorely lack” (ibid., 450). They furthermore maintain that diasporic activities are best studied “in the ‘theoretical space’ shared by constructivism and liberalism”, since both paradigms acknowledge “the impact of both identity and domestic interaction on international behavior” (ibid., 451). The influence of domestic interest groups/diasporas may be particularly useful to explain strong socio-cultural, economic ties or cooperation on innovation, while finding it more difficult to explain security ties.

Another domestic level explanation for alliances or otherwise strong bilateral relations, is the concept of ideological proximity. While in principle an ideational phenomenon, ideological proximity actually plays a prominent role in some variants of realism as well. Indeed, Walt (1987, 33-40; 181-203; 1997b, 168) pays a great deal of attention to this concept in his discussion on why alliances endure or collapse.\footnote{Walt refers to ideological \textit{solidarity} instead of proximity (1997b, 168).} According to Walt “ideological solidarity exists when two independent states share common political values and objectives”, and “states will usually prefer to ally with governments whose political outlook is similar to their own” (1997b, 168.). Different or conflicting ideologies can likewise result in alliance dissolution (ibid., 162). While all relationships do not have to be alliances, there is no reason to assume that Walt’s logic does not apply to other types of bilateral relationships as well. Hence, that states are (more) inclined to engage in bilateral

\footnote{Walt refers to ideological \textit{solidarity} instead of proximity (1997b, 168).}
relationships and/or strengthen ties with states that have a (political) ideology similar to their own, rather than a different (conflicting) one.

The concept of ideological proximity may prove useful to explain alliances as well as other (strong) relations between states, but also between state leaders, on a socio-cultural or identity level.

2.3 Academic literature on Israel-Russia relations

When it comes to academic literature on Israel’s relation with Russia, much of the work is dedicated to their historical relations, often in the wider context of Russia’s standing in the Middle East (e.g. Freedman 1995, 2001, 2010; Katz 2005, 2008; Epstein 2007; Magen & Naumkin 2013). With regard to the aforementioned theoretical explanations, some have been discussed quite extensively whereas others have not been mentioned at all. Diaspora’s have received a great deal of attention in the academic literature on Israel (Remennick 2002; Tartakovsky 2008), while ideological proximity has been mentioned as a contributing factor in general literature on Israel-Russia relations (Katz 2005). In terms of threats and security, some academic literature exists on the triangular relationship between Israel, Russia and Iran, the latter a sworn enemy of one and a strategic ally of the other (e.g. Bahgat 2005).

An interesting publication is a collection of articles that were written as background information for an Israeli conference on Israel-Russia relations held in 2013 (Magen & Naumkin 2013).16 The articles together form a comprehensive historical overview that take into account a large variety of factors. What lacks however, is a theoretical explanation and interpretation of these historical narratives of the Israel-Russia relations. It is here that I hope to make a (modest) contribution.

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16 The conference was an initiative of the ‘Institute for National Security Studies’ and was organized in collaboration with the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.
3. THEORY

As was indicated in the literature review, scholars have provided different theories on the systemic, systemic-domestic and domestic level to explain why states form alliances or seek to establish or strengthen ties with particular states. In this chapter, these theoretical explanations are operationalized and translated into variables.

As will become clear in the remainder from this chapter, the predominant paradigm is realism. This is not surprising, given that Israel’s foreign policy is historically centered around its security, which is a central concept in realism. It does however not mean that realism will therefore automatically be able to tell the entire story. It will for example have a hard time to explain ties unrelated to security, such as cultural ties or personal relationships between state leaders. This is where other explanations, such as liberal or ideational/constructivist theories may prove to be useful. Indeed, although the aforementioned theories have been presented as rival theories, they are not mutually exclusive, and in practice they are even likely to complement each other. As the dependent variable may be multidimensional, some or all of the variables may contribute through explaining certain aspects of it.

3.1 Variables

Israel’s behavior vis-à-vis Russia, that for reasons outlined in the introduction can be considered puzzling, forms the basis for this study’s dependent variable (DV). In the literature review several theories were discussed that can help explain why Israel seeks to strengthen ties with Russia at this moment, and why it may have done so since 1991. These theories will now be translated into four causal variables. The primary causal variable, or independent variable (IV) is derived from the realist concept of ‘strategic hedging’, and seeks to explain Israel’s behavior vis-à-vis Russia and the United States (especially since 2009). The other causal variables (rival theories or RT’s) are derived from realism’s notion of ‘balance of threat’, the liberalist/constructivist notion of diaspora’s, and the ideational notion of ideological proximity.

**Dependent variable (DV): Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia**

The dependent variable in this study is Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia. This has two implications for the study, that is divided in three phases. First it should be established
whether Israel has indeed sought to strengthen ties in each of these phases. Then, it should also be established what kind of ties were sought to be strengthened. When this is done, analyses will show why Israel sought to strengthen these particular ties over the course of its relationship with Russia. The several domains in which Israel can seek to strengthen ties with Russia are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Israel-Russia relations - domains

1. Socio-cultural
2. Economic/innovative
3. Diplomatic/political
4. Military

Independent variable (IV): Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions

The first causal variable to be introduced is derived from the previously discussed hedging strategy, as a possible explanation for Israel’s behavior vis-à-vis Russia and the United States. As was outlined in the introduction, Israel and the US have experienced deteriorating political ties over the last years, while at the same time Israel-Russia ties have improved.

While hedging has been used to describe state behavior in various contexts, Tessman contends that strategic hedging “will be most prevalent in systems that are unipolar and in the process of power deconcentration. These systems are defined by a leading state that enjoys power preponderance, but is clearly in relative decline. For second-tier states, strategic hedging behavior is effective because it … can insure the hedging state against security threats that might result from the loss of public goods or subsidies that are provided by the system leader at that time.” (Tessman 2012, 193).

Looking at the present situation, many people will argue that, despite still being the most powerful actor in the world, the United States is indeed in relative decline (Layne 2012). President Obama himself has said: “[My doctrine is] an American leadership that

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17 The IV is derived from Rose’s neoclassical realism, where it is described as one of the intervening variables (1988, 152). The decision to use this variable as IV is based on the earlier mentioned difference between explaining general state behavior and foreign policy. This study seeks to do the latter and therefore emphasizes the domestic variables. The other intervening variable – domestic state structure – is left out of the study as the influence of this variable is considered negligible in the case of Israel. Indeed, as Inbar writes: “Israeli decision making … has always been extremely centralized and has remained the coveted privilege of the very few” (1998, 63-64).
recognizes the rise of countries like China, India and Brazil. It’s a U.S. leadership that recognizes our limits in terms of resources and capacity” (Time 2012).

According to Tessman, such a decline could lead second-tier states that depend on the system leader to ‘hedge’, if they fear that this decline will either lead to a military confrontation with the leader state, or if they anticipate “security threats that might result from the loss of public goods or subsidies that are currently being provided by the system leader” (2012, 192-193). Whereas the former will lead to Type A hedging, the latter may result in Type B hedging (see Figure A.1).

Whether Israel, as a second-tier state that is highly dependent on the system leader (both in terms of subsidies and public goods such as security guarantees), will or will not conduct a hedging strategy does not so much depend on the question whether the United States is (or is not) in relative decline, but rather what the consequences are, if this were to be the case. The first option – a military dispute between Israel and the United States – is so unlikely that it can be ignored. The second option however, could become a concern of Israel, which is highly dependent on the United States in more than one way. Whether or not to hedge is thus rather a question of Israel’s perceptions on the intentions and capabilities of the United States, were it to decline: will it and can it still ensure Israel’s security?

The United States enjoys military superiority and will continue to do so in the next decade or two (Layne 2012, 205). Therefore, the next question is not so much whether it will be able, but whether it will be willing to deploy these military capabilities for Israel’s security. The answer to this question depends on US intentions vis-à-vis Israel in general and the greater Middle East. Hence, Israel’s decision to conduct strategic hedging will depend on its perceptions of US intentions. Not all US intentions will however be equally relevant for Israel’s decision to hedge or not. Perceptions are therefore subdivided in three components that are assumed to be relevant in light of Israel’s (perceived) security, and therefore, in Israel’s decision to hedge (or not).

The first component consists of perceived US intentions vis-à-vis Israel and the Middle East peace process (MEPP). What is the overall impression of the US government intentions vis-à-vis Israel, is it largely supportive and sympathetic, or is it critical? Does the US government exert much pressure on Israel to make progress on the peace process and to stop building settlements?

The second component is the perceived US stance on Iran and on the Middle East in general. Israeli decision makers’ closely follow US intentions vis-à-vis Iran. Questions like “Is the United States tough on Iran and is there a credible threat of military strikes or (harder)
sanctions, or does it prefer diplomacy and negotiations?” will most likely occupy Israeli decision makers. Regarding the Middle East in general, Israeli decision makers will look at US presence in the region, and whether it is a dominant, credible power, or not. This is important because Israel’s deterrence is partly based on the widespread assumption that the United States will help Israel militarily if needed (Inbar 2012, 64).

The last component of US intentions concerns the bilateral aid that Israel receives of the United States. This can be divided in economic, military, and diplomatic assistance (Mearsheimer & Walt 2007, 23-48). Israel has long been receiving considerable assistance in all these domains. A (sudden) change in any of these donations will most likely affect Israeli decision makers’ perception of US intentions.18

In terms of explanatory value, this variable could be useful in explaining why Israel would seek to increase ties with Russia in the strategic or military realm with the intention to diversify its dependencies (which would constitute strategic hedging), especially if Israel at the same time experiences deteriorating ties with the United States.

Rival theory 1 (RT1): Preservation nuclear deterrence
This variable stems from Walt’s ‘balance-of-threat’ theory and is based on the idea that at this moment Israel enjoys a nuclear monopoly in the Middle East, which it wishes to maintain.1920 This nuclear monopoly actually constitutes an imbalance of power in the region, that, according to Waltz, benefits Israel (2012, 3). Indeed, Israel’s nuclear deterrence is considered a vital element of its national security (ibid.). If this were lost – which would happen in case Iran would acquire a nuclear weapon – the Israeli government anticipates grave consequences for Israel’s security (ibid.).21

Israel’s bombing of Iraqi and Syrian nuclear facilities in the past illustrate how keen it is on maintaining its nuclear deterrence (ibid.). In case Iran would proceed to obtain nuclear capability, Israel may contemplate conducting a military attack on Iran as well.

18 Intelligence cooperation is also assumed to play a role in Israel’s perceptions of US intentions. However, as this cannot be measured and does not constitute bilateral aid but bilateral cooperation, this factor is not included in the study.
19 Just as the IV, this variable also constitutes a systemic-domestic explanation, given that systemic pressures (a change in the balance of threat) are translated through the decision makers’ perceptions. Indeed, no nuclear weapon has been acquired (yet) and Iran maintains that its nuclear program serves peaceful purposes only.
20 Israel maintains an official policy of nuclear opacity. Giles (2002, 23) defines this as “the ability to influence other nations’ perceptions in the absence of official acknowledgement of nuclear weapons possession and with only circumstantial evidence that such weapons exist.” However, even the United States openly speculates about Israel’s nuclear arsenal (Zanotti 2014, 28).
21 Whereas the IV concerns a potential future threat, a nuclear Iran is considered an imminent (existential) threat.
Russia is considered a key player in Israel’s determination to remain the sole nuclear power in the Middle East. During much of the time-period under investigation, Russia and Iran have talked about a transfer of Russian S-300 defense systems\(^{22}\) to Iran. In 2006 they signed a contract, but so far no delivery has taken place. Russia can therefore be considered ‘the keeper of the (im)balance’.

If Israel indeed views Russia as such, this will presumably have implications for its behavior vis-à-vis Russia. Balancing or bandwagoning do not apply given that Russia does not feel threatened by Iran and is not the aggressor. What can be expected instead, is that Israel – as it tries to persuade Russia to not deliver the S-300 systems – will seek to please Russia. This can be done either through the strengthening of ‘general’ ties, especially if this benefits Russia, or through actions that are explicitly linked to the S-300.

**Rival theory 2 (RT2): Russian diaspora in Israel**

This variable is based on the constructivist/liberalist explanation of the influence of domestic interest groups. This study will focus on diasporas, a particular type of domestic interest groups. Israel is home to approximately 1.2 million Russian/Soviet immigrants, who have remained “closely affiliated to the country of origin” (Tartakovsky 2008, 562-563). Remennick describes the Russian Jewish immigrants as “transmigrants”, who “develop economic activities, enjoy cultural life and keep dense informal networks … with their home country (2002, 516). Their impact on Israel’s society has been profound with a large degree of socio-cultural and identity transnationalism (ibid., 518; 528). Economic and political transnationalism are more limited, but do exist (ibid., 528). Remennick furthermore indicated that the “influence of Russian Jews on Israeli politics, legislation and economic life is growing” (ibid.). This is endorsed by Khanin, who has described how this Russian-speaking community has established ‘Russian parties’ in the 1990s (2002).

Strengthened ties with Russia can thus also be explained from a liberal/constructivist (non-security) approach, as an outcome of the transnational activities of the Russian diaspora. Important to note here is that Israel-Russia relations can be strengthened through the diaspora’s own transnational activities, and/or through their political representation on a government level (ibid.). This particular explanation of the influence of diasporas is especially plausible when the (strengthened) ties are found in the socio-cultural or economic/innovative realm.

\(^{22}\) The S-300 is a long range surface-to-air missile defense system. A defense system like the S-300 would impede a military strike significantly (Magen & Shapir, 2009).
Rival theory 3 (RT3): Ideological proximity

The last variable concerns Israel’s ideology. According to Smooha “Zionism is de facto the state ideology” (2002, 485). Zionism can be described as the right of the Jewish people to their own territory and political sovereignty (Laqueur 2003). This nationalist ideology has a security related implication: not only do the Jewish people have a right to their own state, they also have the right to defend this state (ibid.). Israel, that feels ‘encircled’ by adversaries, has a security strategy that is based on two main features: deterrence and “strongly offensive measures” (Giles 2002, 1-2; Petrelli 2013, 674). Deterrence in particular is considered vital, as it is widely assumed that “a decline in Israeli deterrence invites aggression” (Inbar 2012, 64). Israel’s ideology is thus also closely related to the concept of ‘strategic culture’, in terms of whether use of (military) force is preferable or not.23

As Walt stated, similar ideologies can be a reason for states to establish or strengthen ties (1997b, 168). Therefore, Israel seeking to improve ties with Russia may also be explained in terms of similar ideologies. Deteriorating ties, on the other hand, may be a signal of conflicting ideologies (ibid., 162). Ideology in this study pertains to nationalism and the perspective on how to (best) protect the nation (deterrence and offensive measures, use of force). In this study, ideological proximity will be assessed both in relation to Russia and the United States. Ideological proximity can be used as explanation for alliances, but also for ties that are not security-driven.

3.2 Causal mechanism and hypotheses

Now that all the variables are specified, the following ‘base line’ causal mechanism can be established. This model is a representation of the starting point for this study: Israel’s conflicting behavior vis-à-vis Russia and the United States since 2009 (explained by the IV). However, as this is a mere expectation, and since there are two more phases to investigate, three rival theories (or variables) have been introduced as well. After the discussion of the three phases (or cases), a causal mechanism will be established for each of them in the analysis. In this manner, causality can be established for every phase, as well as a possible interaction between variables.

Deriving from the variables and the causal mechanism are the following testable hypotheses:

**IV: Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions**

**H1.1:** The more critical the United States is perceived to be on Israel, and the more it pressures Israel to move on the peace process, the more Israel will feel inclined to hedge.

**H1.2:** The tougher the perceived US position towards Iran and the greater the perceived US presence in the Middle East, the lesser Israel’s inclination to hedge.

**H1.3:** The more military, economic and diplomatic aid Israel receives of the United States, the lesser Israel will feel inclined to hedge.

**RT1: Preserving nuclear deterrence**

**H2:** The stronger Israel seeks to preserve its nuclear deterrence through Russia, the more Israel will try to please Russia.
RT2: Russian diaspora in Israel

*H3: The more political power Russian political parties have, the more Israel will seek to strengthen socio-cultural and economic ties with Russia.*

RT3: Ideological proximity

*H4.1: The more similar Israel and Russia’s ideology, the more Israel will seek to strengthen ties with Russia.*

*H4.2: The more dissimilar Israel’s ideology with the United States and the more similar Israel’s ideology with Russia, the more Israel will seek to strengthen ties with Russia.*
4. RESEARCH DESIGN

Now that the variables and hypotheses have been specified, this chapter will discuss the research design. Two complementary methods – structured focused comparison (SFC) and process-tracing (PT) will be conducted in order to answer the research question. After a brief description of these methods, the case selection will be motivated, followed by the operationalization of the variables. To conclude there will be an overview of the sources.

4.1 Methodology

The research question will be answered by conducting a qualitative analysis consisting of a cross-case analysis and within-case analyses, hereby making use of two complementary methods: structured focused comparison (SFC) and process-tracing (PT), both described comprehensively by George and Bennett in their book *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (2005). While SFC is used to establish how variables change over time and whether there is a relation between them, PT is used to uncover causality between the variables (ibid.).

Structured focused comparison

This method is particularly suitable to compare cases in a structured manner. As George and Bennett explain: “The method is “structured” in that the researcher writes general questions that reflect the research objective and that these questions are asked of each case under study to guide and standardize data collection, thereby making systematic comparison and cumulation of the findings of the cases possible. The method is “focused” in that it deals only with certain aspects of the historical cases examined” (2005, 67).

The method will be used to compare the previously introduced variables in three subsequent phases. For the purpose of this study, the following questions have been formulated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Questions SFC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Did Israel seek to strengthen ties with Russia during this period (and if so, which ones)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How were US intentions perceived by the Israeli decision makers during this period?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To what extent did Israel seek to persuade Russia to not sell or deliver S-300 systems to Iran during this period?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. How much political power did the Russian diaspora have during this period?
5. To what extent were Russia’s and the US ideology similar to that of Israel during this period?

**Process-tracing**

Whereas SFC provides an overview of how the dependent and causal variables have changed (or not) over time, “the process-tracing method attempts to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable” (George and Bennett 2005, 206). It is a commonly used method for theory testing and theory development, but can also be used to explain specific historical cases without involving theory or aiming for generalization of results (ibid., 207-210). The method thus comes in different varieties. This study shall use a form of process-tracing that takes the middle ground between two such varieties. The first regards “a more analytical form of process-tracing, [in which] at least parts of the narrative are accompanied with explicit causal hypotheses highly specific to the case without, however, employing theoretical variables for this purpose or attempting to extrapolate the case’s explanation into a generalization.” The second variety “converts a historical narrative into an analytical causal explanation couched in explicit theoretical forms” (ibid., 211).

As this study does not aim to produce generalizable results, but rather to explain certain outcomes in the highly specific case of Israel, the process-tracing will take a rather analytical form while maintaining strong elements of historical narratives and both causal hypotheses and theoretical variables are included. This ‘custom made’ variant of process-tracing will be applied for every phase in order to uncover causality.

**4.2 Case selection**

For the purpose of this study one longitudinal case – Israel-Russia relations since the resumption of diplomatic ties in 1991 – has been divided into three separate cases, or phases. The division in these three time-periods is based on US presidencies, starting with the Clinton administration24 (1993-2000), followed by the Bush Presidency (2001-2008), to conclude with the Obama administration (2009-2015). The reason for this particular division stems from the IV, that serves as the starting point for this study. Although a comprehensive

24 George Bush (senior) was president until January 1993. Given the marginal overlap with the time-period under investigation (October 1991 – present), his presidency will not be included in the study.
discussion of the three phases – especially the third phase – follows in the next chapter, a brief description of each phase’s main characteristics is provided below.

The first phase covers the period from October 1991 to January 2001, and as such, the whole of Bill Clinton’s presidency. Israel knew no less than five different prime ministers during this time-period. The main focus will however be on three of them: Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu. In Russia, Gorbachev was Russia’s (first) president.

The second phase covers the whole of George W. Bush’ presidency, from January 2001 to January 2009, as well as Vladimir Putin’s presidency (2000-2008). In Israel the prime ministers in this time-period were Ariel Sharon (2001-2005) and Ehud Olmert (2006-2009).

The third and last phase starts in January 2009, when Barack Obama is inaugurated as president of the United States. A few months later, Netanyahu becomes prime minister of Israel for the second time. Both leaders have retained their function until today. In Russia, Dmitry Medvedev temporarily replaced Putin as president of Russia between 2008 and 2012. Putin, in the meantime, served as Russia’s prime minister, before starting his third presidential term.

4.3 Operationalization variables

Before proceeding with the case studies and analysis, it is important to take a closer look at the variables and their operationalization.

Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia (DV)

Earlier an overview of the several domains of Israel-Russia relations was established. Indicators of Israel’s wish to strengthen ties in any (or several) of these domains may differ per domain. An overview of these indicators per domain is provided in Table 3 at the end of this section.

An indicator that applies to nearly all of these domains are ‘agreements’ (on cooperation). However, agreements are a product not only of Israeli but also of Russian decision making. Although every agreement can be assumed to reflect a general wish of Israel to strengthen ties with Russia, it should be established – as far as this is possible – whether the agreement was an initiative of Russia or Israel. In this manner, an assessment can be made of Israel’s motives in strengthening ties with Russia.

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Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions (IV)
Perception is a rather problematic concept in terms of measurement. While the division of the IV in three different components has added a degree of structure at least, this does not solve the problem of its measurement, that lies in the lack of good and clear indicators. While statements, actions and/or testimonies from Israeli decision makers’ themselves or analysts may prove to be useful, shaping a perfect image of perception is simply impossible. Notwithstanding this problem, the study will seek to get as close as possible, through the use of a broad range of sources. An overview of these sources is provided in paragraph 4.4.

Preserving nuclear deterrence (RT1)
This variable is rather problematic in terms of measurement, as it also has a base in perception. However, in the case studies it will show that Israel’s perception of the Iranian nuclear danger is fairly constant. The degree in which continued Israeli nuclear monopoly in the Middle East is sought to be established through Russia does however differ. While bringing up the subject and expressing concerns in bilateral meetings can be considered one (indirect) indicator of seeking to preserve nuclear deterrence, Israel’s ‘pleasing behavior’ in light of in Russia’s imminent S-300 deal with Iran forms another, more direct indicator. This behavior may however be hard to distinguish and/or measure, as Israel may not link it explicitly to the S-300 deal.

Russian diaspora in Israel (RT2)
This variable is the easiest in terms of measurement, as it mostly concerns quantitative data or a simple yes or no. The first indicator regards the mere existence of Russian political parties. If such a party (or parties) exist, an assessment is made of the political power or influence of these parties, through various additional indicators, such as whether these parties take seat in the government (yes/no), the number of seats in Knesset (n), and the number of prominent functions such as ministerial posts (n). What cannot be measured, unfortunately, is the power/influence that the Russian diaspora enjoyed prior to the establishment of the first Russian party (so without political representation).

Ideological proximity (RT3)
In the theory section the most important aspects of Israel’s ideology were distinguished. The operationalization of this variable will consist of an assessment of the degree in which the US and Russia’s ideology coincided with those aspects. This comes down to the questions: to
what extent did/do Russia and the United States have a similar ideology in terms of having a nationalist ideology (during this specific time-period)? And did/do they rely on deterrence and offensive measures?

Table 3: Variables and indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia (DV)</td>
<td>- socio-cultural (<em>events; statements; agreements</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- economic (<em>agreements; trade numbers</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- political/diplomatic (<em>statements; UN support</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- military (<em>agreements</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions (IV)</td>
<td>- perception US intentions on Israel and MEPP <em>(critical/uncritical; pressure/no pressure)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- perception US intentions vis-a-vis Iran and ME <em>(tough/weak; dominant power; withdrawing power)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- bilateral aid/assistance: military aid <em>(height of annual grant)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- economic aid <em>(height of annual grant)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- diplomatic assistance <em>(UN support)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserving nuclear deterrence (RT1)</td>
<td>mentioning of Iran/S-300 in bilateral meetings;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Israeli efforts to please Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political power Russian diaspora (RT2)</td>
<td>existence Russian political party <em>(yes/no)</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>takes seat in government <em>(yes/no)</em>; seats in Knesset <em>(n)</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>prominent functions <em>(n)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideological proximity (RT3)</td>
<td>nationalism; use of force over diplomacy <em>(yes/no)</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leadership style <em>(strong/weak)</em>; reliance on deterrence and offensive measures <em>(yes/no)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 Sources and data collection

The primary sources in this study concern academic works or testimonies of scholars or analysts. Their historical overviews have assisted greatly in shaping a general image of the variables over time. Specific data is found in news articles or on the websites of state governments, such as the homepage of the Knesset, the Kremlin etc. As far as possible, I have sought to use articles from ‘high quality’ newspapers only.
Some variables such as the IV, due to their abstract character, require a broad range of sources. Here one should think of the aforementioned testimonies of scholars, analysts, but also of sources as WikiLeaks. The advantage of WikiLeaks is that it contains confidential information from diplomatic meetings. It is therefore less likely to be subject to ‘noise’, than, for example, public statements, which may not necessarily pertain to the truth. This is not to say that statements are not useful. Indeed, both sources are likely to complement each other in shaping an (as) correct (as possible) image of perceptions.

Interviews
Additional data (information) will be obtained through interviews, that serve two purposes. First, the interviewees will provide their perspectives on the research question and causality. This implies a confirmation or refutation of the existing ideas (method to test the proposed causal mechanism). Secondly, the interviewees may point to important events or other overlooked information, thus serving as a ‘double check’.

In the margins of this study, two interviews are conducted. The first interviewee is Daniel Levy, director of the MENA Program at the European Council on Foreign Relations. The second interviewee is former US Ambassador to Israel and Egypt, Daniel Kurtzer.

26 The diplomatic cables of the “Cablegate” collection are particularly useful in this regard, as they contain confidential information that would otherwise not be attainable.
27 Complete profiles of the interviewees can be found in the appendix
5. CASE STUDIES

The current chapter comprises the case studies of the previously identified phases: the restoration of diplomatic ties between Israel and Russia until Bush’ inauguration (1991-2000), the entire Bush administration (2001-2008), and the Obama administration (2009-2015). After a short background section the three phases are presented in chronological order. The analyses are limited to what is considered relevant in light of this study’s objective and research question. Given the strong emphasis on the current phase (from 2009 onwards), this phase will be discussed in greater detail.

5.1 Background

When David Ben-Gurion on 15 May 1948 proclaimed “the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine, to be called Israel” (Naamani 1972, 82), the United States and USSR were among the first (great) powers to recognize this (Katz 2005, 51; Zanotti 2014, 38). However, contact with those states would remain limited for a very long time. Situated in a turbulent region, Israel initially sought to maintain a policy of non-alignment but soon found this to be impossible and instead aligned itself with the United States (Walt 1987, 95).

In the early years of Israel’s existence, France assumed the role of patron and main weapon supplier. It even helped Israel develop its controversial nuclear facilities in the 1950s and 1960s, which would become an important part of Israel’s deterrence. After the Suez crisis in 1956, relations between France and Israel gradually weakened (Heimann 2010). The Six-Day War in 1967 marked both the beginning of the “special relationship” with the United States and the end of all diplomatic ties with the USSR (Katz 2005, 51; Walt 1987, 99-103).

Over the course of its existence, Israel has been involved in several armed conflicts.28 Except for the Sinai War and the First Lebanon War, it deliberately chose to fight these wars alone, as Yitzhak Rabin famously explained that “ultimately Israel can only rely on itself” (Inbar 1997). Israel’s enemies in these wars mostly consisted of varying coalitions of its Arab neighbors. While Israel’s relations with Iran were quite good during the Pahlavi era, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 turned Iran into a sworn enemy of Israel as well. The relationship would only continue to worsen, although Israel actually supported Iran in its war against Iraq in 1988 (Farhang 1989). After the end of this war tensions increased once again, as the newly

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28 War of Independence (1948); Sinai War (1956); Six-Day War (1967); War of Attrition (1969-1970); Yom Kippur War (1973); First Lebanon War (1982-1985); Second Lebanon War (2006); and many more armed conflicts (varying coalitions..)
elected President Rafsanjani and Ayatollah Khamenei continued to use Ayatollah Khomeini’s (hostile) discourse vis-à-vis Israel and the West in general. Later, Iran’s apparent nuclear ambitions would further add to Israel’s increasing concerns (The New York Times 1995).

5.2 Phase 1: Restoration diplomatic ties with Russia – Inauguration Bush

Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia

After several decades of a complete absence of bilateral relations, diplomatic ties between Israel and Russia were restored in October 1991 when the Cold War officially came to an end with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Although Israel intended to establish relations with all the successor states of the USSR, it sought to improve ties with Russia in particular. Russia was considered a priority in economic, military and diplomatic sense, as it inherited the UNSC seat with veto right. However, most importantly, it was home to the largest Jewish population within the former USSR. Israel hoped that many of Russia’s Jews would emigrate to Israel. Indeed, during the 1990s approximately 1 million Russian immigrants settled in Israel, after a long period of highly restricted emigration policies had prevented them from leaving Russia. Besides a sudden upsurge in social and cultural ties, this “bridge” of Russian Israeli’s also provided an incentive for both governments to strengthen ties in other areas (Freedman 1995, 234, 246; Remennick 2002, 518).

In the margins of their new relationship, Israel and Russia signed 16 agreements and decided on priority areas for cooperation, such as agriculture (Karasova 2013, 51). Economic ties were also on the rise: upon returning from his first visit (and the first ever of an Israeli prime minister) to Russia, Rabin said that economy and trade had been at the top of the agenda (The New York Times 1994; Los Angeles Times 1994). Other projects focused on technical cooperation, such as the co-production of an AWACS radar aircraft, that was sold to India (Freedman 2010, 51).

In 1997 new Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also travelled to Russia to meet with his counterpart Boris Yeltsin. During the visit it was decided that Israel and Russia would “accelerate economic ties”, and Israel even gave Russia a $50 million loan and proposed to buy Russian natural gas (Freedman 2010, 52). Both the Russian and Israeli governments denied that this had anything to do with Israel’s desire to persuade Russia from supplying defense weaponry to Iran and Syria, both of which allies of Russia (JTA 1997). However, when Netanyahu learned that Russia had also supplied Iran with “missile

29 Airborne Warning and Control System
technology”, he cancelled further discussions on the proposed gas deal (ibid.). Indeed, Russia’s relation with and assistance to Iran – including building a nuclear reactor – was a sore point in the normalization process (Freedman 2010, Karasova 2013, 51-53). Despite their disagreements on Iran and Russia’s continued (diplomatic) support for the Arab states, trade rose to $1 billion annually at the end of this phase and (Freedman 2010, 53).

**Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions**

The dissolution of the USSR meant the end of the Cold War and the beginning of an unipolar era in which the US remained as the sole, unchallenged world leader. It did not mean the end of Israel’s and the US’ “special relationship”. Indeed, in the years to come the relationship would only grow stronger.

This was especially the case during the first term of Bill Clinton’s Presidency. Whereas Bush was considered a pragmatic that had been committed to Israel’s security, Clinton “assumed office … with a strong admiration and sympathy for Israel” (Lewis 1999, 369-370). US-Israeli relations peaked in the period from 1993 to mid-1996 when “strategies toward the Arab-Israeli peace process … were synchronized”, and the Rabin and Peres cabinets established a de facto freeze on “Israeli government encouragement of new settlement expansion in the West Bank”, hereby eliminating a recurring source of frustration between the two states (ibid., 371). In their shared desire to reach an agreement in the Oslo process, Rabin and Clinton even developed a close personal friendship (ibid., 370).

When Rabin was assassinated in 1995 and the “hawkish” Netanyahu was elected as new prime minister in 1996, this greatly impaired the implementation of the Oslo accords and eventually led to a complete halt (ibid., 371). A final attempt of Clinton to revitalize the peace process during the 2000 Camp David summit, did not lead to an agreement and left the MEPP unsolved (Matz 2006).

Apart from the peace process, the United States under Clinton also was an active and dominant player in the rest of the Middle East, especially with regard to Iran and Iraq (Riedel 2010). The US policy towards Iran (and Iraq) was one of so-called dual containment, consisting of a “military deterrent based in the Gulf states, targeted economic sanctions to

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30 As Lewis (1999, 370) describes: “[it was] the older, more experienced Rabin [that] assumed seniority, outlining to Clinton the diplomatic strategy he wanted to follow and readily obtaining Clinton’s support.”

31 “Hawk” is a word used for right wing politicians that “lack a willingness to make territorial concessions”. (The Israel Democracy Institute 2008).
discourage foreign investment in Iran, and diplomacy to discourage Iranian support for terrorism and pursuit of a nuclear capability” (ibid., 1).

The US perception of Israel as both a friend and a valuable ally is further illustrated by the considerable military and economic aid Israel continued to receive from the United States, even though Israel did not have the same strategic value as it did during the Cold War. Throughout the period from 1991 until 2001, Israel annually received a military grant of approximately $1.8 billion and an economic grant of $1.2 billion (Sharp 2014, 26-27). The United States furthermore supported Israel diplomatically in the United Nations Security Council by either voting against or vetoing five Resolutions that were considered harmful to Israel. On all of the occasions that the United States used its veto right, it was the only state to do so (U.S. Department of State).

**Preserving nuclear deterrence**

Already in 1995 Israeli officials indicated that Iran’s nuclear program would be “the biggest threat that Israel would face in the next decade” (The New York Times 1995). If the program was not halted, Israel would be forced “to consider attacking Iran’s nuclear reactors”, like it had in Iraq, senior Israeli officials said (ibid.). Israel was particularly concerned with Russia’s involvement in Iran’s nuclear program, which included among others Iran’s purchase of a Russian nuclear reactor (Katz 2005, 51). Russia also supplied Iran with “nuclear know how” (Arms Control Association 2001). Finally, there were even talks about Russia supplying Iran with S-300 defense systems, although these were still far from concrete (Magen & Shapir 2009). While no explicit statements were made about this, Netanyahu’s withdrawal of the gas proposal in 1997 may have been a clear signal of its opposition to the Russian-Iranian cooperation.

**Russian diaspora in Israel**

The large influx of Russian (or other former Soviet) Jewish immigrants in the 1990s profoundly impacted Israel’s demography. Remennick describes Israel’s Russian-speaking community, which made up 20 per cent of Israel’s total population, a “transnational community”, which had created “a thriving subculture of their own” (2002, 515). This led to the establishment of the first ‘Russian party’ in 1996, ‘Yisrael B’aliya’ (Israel on the Rise/Israel for Aliya). The party was founded after it was concluded that the “political
potential of aliya\textsuperscript{32} cannot be realized within the framework of existing Israeli parties”, and that “only a Russian immigrant party could attain its political goals” (Khanin 2002, 40-41). In 1999 Moldovan born Avigdor Lieberman founded the (far) right-wing party ‘Yisrael Beiteinu’ (Israel Our Home). While elections in 1996 and 1999 did not yet yield the parties with considerable political power, the mere presence of the immigrants provided a platform for increasing socio-cultural and economic relations (Khanin 2002).

**Ideological proximity**

Compared to previous (and subsequent) decades, the 1990s were a remarkably quiet and peaceful period. The end of the Cold War had left the United States as the unchallenged superpower, and for Israel it was the first decade since its existence that it was not involved in any full-scale war.\textsuperscript{33} Indeed, the Oslo process/accords and implementation dominated the larger part of the period, with Clinton and Rabin/Peres sharing the same ideology. When Netanyahu became prime minister in 1996, the Israeli government shifted from the left to the right, which meant a divergence in political outlook with the Clinton administration as well (Lewis 1999, 370-372).

Meanwhile, Russia was involved in several “domestic” wars. Its conflict with Chechen insurgents lasted from 1994 until 1996, and resumed in 1999. Later Israeli leaders would admire Putin’s steadfastness and tough stance in his battle against the Chechens, and draw similarities with Israel’s own battle against Islam-inspired terrorism (Katz 2005, 57-59).

5.3 Phase 2: The Bush administration

**Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia**

When Boris Yeltsin suddenly resigned as president of Russia at the end of 1999, he was succeeded by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. In Israel, former Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon succeeded Ehud Barak as prime minister in March 2001. Under their leadership bilateral relations between Russia and Israel improved significantly (Katz 2005, 59).

Ariel Sharon, who had a Russian background himself and spoke the language fluently, visited Moscow in 2001, 2002 and 2003. On all three occasions he raised the issue of Iran’s nuclear program, and expressed his concerns about Russia’s assistance in this regard (ibid., 52; 59). While disagreeing on Iran, Sharon and Putin found each other in their fight against

\textsuperscript{32} Aliya refers to the immigration of diasporic Jews to Israel.

\textsuperscript{33} Israel was however involved in other armed conflicts: the First Intifada lasted until ’93 and the Second Intifada started in 2000. Moreover, several suicide attacks were carried out in Israel throughout the 1990s.
terrorism. Russia, although having long supported the Arab countries in the Middle East conflicts, saw similarities between Chechen terrorist attacks in Russia and suicide attacks in Israel during the Second Intifada (ibid., 53). This resulted in a decision of the state leaders to work together in the field of counter terrorism (ibid., 59).

In 2005 Putin was the first Russian head of state to ever visit Israel. While receiving “a red-carpet welcome”, Israeli leaders also seized the opportunity to express to Putin their concerns about Russia’s assistance to Israel’s enemies, the sale of weaponry and assistance in the development of an Iranian nuclear power plant in particular. Nonetheless, Sharon assured Putin that he was “among friends” (The New York Times 2005).

A ‘diplomatic spat’ erupted a year later, when Russia – as a member of the Quartet invited to Moscow a delegation of Hamas headed by its leader Khaled Mashal, a sworn enemy of the Israeli government (Epstein 2007, 181-185). In 2007 Russia and Iran announced that they had agreed that Russia would supply Iran with S-300 defense systems, although it was not yet clear when the systems would be transferred (Magen & Shapir 2009). Both instances, while causing some strong reactions by the Israeli’s, did not prevent economic and cultural ties from rising steadily, or an agreement abolishing visa requirements to facilitate tourism (Karasova 2013, 54-56).

In 2008, Russia fought a short war with its neighbor state Georgia. Israel had good relations with Georgia at that time and was one of its main weapon suppliers (Time 2008). WikiLeaks cables reveal that Russia had requested Israel to arms transfers to Georgia, which it did. “Israeli Ambassador Azeri told the [US] Ambassador … that Russia made clear to Israel its desire for a moratorium on arms sales to Georgia, without insisting that future sales be halted or explicitly linking this issue to Russian arms sales to Syria and Iran. Tel Aviv did, however, put a hold on resuming arms sales to Georgia at a time when Israel was pressing Russia not to sell certain weapons systems [S-300] to Syria or Iran” (2008).

Thus, while not mentioning it explicitly, Israel hoped that stopping its arms sales to Georgia would lead Russia to reconsider transferring the S-300 systems to Iran. Furthermore, Israel’s response to the conflict was far more moderate than those from the US and other Western states. According to diplomatic cables leaked by WikiLeaks “Russia was “satisfied” with Israel’s “measured” position on Georgia, which recognized Georgia’s territorial integrity but did not criticize Russian actions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.” Apparently “neither

34 The Quartet, consisting of the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and Russia, serves as a mediating group in the Middle East peace process, and was created in 2002.
35 One year later, in 2007, Khaled Mashal and a Hamas delegation were invited to Moscow a second time (Epstein 2007, 181-185).
Moscow nor Tel Aviv wanted Georgia to damage bilateral ties that were presently at their “peak,” and [they] had maintained regular communication since the crisis began” (ibid.).

**Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions**

Whereas the Israel-US relationship under the presidency of Clinton was characterized predominantly by the Oslo Process, the Bush era in its turn was dominated by circumstances of a completely different character: 9/11 and its aftermath. Eight months into the Bush presidency, on 11 September 2001, Al Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial aircrafts and flew them into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. Nine days later President Bush declared “the War on Terror”. The consequences of this ‘war’, which came to dominate US foreign policy and included invasions in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), were particularly devastating in the Middle East (Hoffman 2004).

It also had a profound impact on the Israel-US relationship. As a place from where Islamic terrorism was fought, Israel regained much of the strategic value it had lost since the end of the Cold War. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who was facing suicide attacks in Israel during the Second Intifada, convinced President Bush that Israel and the United States were fighting the same enemy. Bush explicitly mentioned Israel’s security as one of the reasons why Iraq needed to be invaded (Mearsheimer & Walt 2007, 60-76; 229-238).

Due to these circumstances the Bush administration was largely uncritical of Israel, in terms of its settlements and the MEPP (ibid., 60-61; Milton-Edwards 2001, 92). Indeed, when Prime Minister Sharon announced his disengagement plan from Gaza in 2004, Bush wrote him a ‘Letter of Assurances’ in which he stated “[the US’] steadfast commitment to Israel’s security, including secure, defensible borders, and to preserve and strengthen Israel’s capability to deter and defend itself, by itself, against any threat or possible combination of threats.” Moreover, Bush stated that a “realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel”, followed by an acknowledgement that “in light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice line of 1949” (Bush 2004). WikiLeaks reveals that Israeli officials were “thrilled with the assurances Sharon received from President Bush … in exchange for moving forward with his unilateral withdrawal plan” (2004). Many Israeli officials considered the statements of “historic importance” as they – in their view – rejected the “right of return” of Palestinian refugees. In
addition, many “saw in the President’s remarks the first statement by a US leader legitimizing
the settlements” (ibid.).

Israel and the United States also seemed to agree on a policy towards Iran, whose first
announcement of successful uranium enrichment in 2006 had caused great concern in
Jerusalem and Washington D.C.. Both Israel and the United States agreed that a tough stance
was needed (Mearsheimer & Walt 2007, 291-305; WikiLeaks 2006b). When diplomatic
efforts did not yield, sanctions were imposed, but this did not take away Israel’s concerns. On
several occasions it asked the US for “more decisive action against the Iranians, based on the
assumption that diplomatic activity is insufficient to curb Tehran’s nuclear ambitions”
(Ynetnews 2008). When Prime Minister Olmert\(^{36}\) visited Washington in 2008, President
Bush personally brought up the topic of Iran and reassured Olmert that Israel did not need
worry. After meeting with Bush in Washington D.C., Olmert said that he “came out with
fewer question marks about the ways, means, time constraints, and determination necessary
for handling the issue” (ibid.). The tough US stance on Iran coincided with its overall large
presence in the Middle East during this time-period.

US bilateral military aid to Israel during these years increased to $2.2 billion per years
on average,\(^{37}\) $400 million per year than under President Clinton. The United States and
Israel agreed to gradually phase out economic aid as Israel had become “a fully industrialized
nation” (Sharp 2014, 2). The United States also steadfastly kept supporting Israel
diplomatically in the UN Security Council, as it blocked nine Resolutions – either through
voting against or using its veto right – that were considered harmful to Israel. Again, the
United States would be the only state to use its veto right to protect Israel. (U.S. Department
of State).

**Preserving nuclear deterrence**

Whereas there had already been talks about Russia supplying Iran with S-300 defense
systems in 1998, an actual contract was not signed until 2006, followed by a public
announcement by both governments in 2007 (Magen & Shapir 2009). As mentioned earlier,
Israel halted its arms supply to Georgia “at a time when Israel was pressing Russia not to
deliver] certain weapons systems to … Iran” (WikiLeaks 2008).

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\(^{36}\) Ehud Olmert had succeeded Ariel Sharon as prime minister after the latter suffered from a stroke and entered
into a coma in 2006.

\(^{37}\) In 2003 the military grant, due to the Iraq invasion, amounted $3.1 billion. This was significantly higher than
the year before and after (Sharp 2014, 26).
Meanwhile international diplomatic efforts were undertaken to scale back Iran’s nuclear program. When Iran in 2006 announced to have enriched uranium for the first time, this led to the formation of the P5+1,\(^\text{38}\) that proposed to Iran a framework agreement “offering incentives … to halt its enrichment program for an indefinite period of time” (Arms Control Association 2014). When Iran rejected the proposal, sanctions were imposed under Resolution 1696 (ibid.). While Israel itself was not part of the P5+1, it would seize every opportunity to pressure the states that were to impose harder sanctions on Iran as long as it did not suspend all uranium enrichment (Times of Israel 2014b).

**Russian diaspora in Israel**

Russian political parties did not gain extensive political power until the elections in 2006, when Yisrael Beiteinu won 11 seats, making it the fifth party in Knesset.\(^\text{39}\) Avigdor Lieberman became Deputy Prime Minister as well as Minister of Strategic Affairs, while his fellow Yisrael Beiteinu MK,\(^\text{40}\) Yitzhak Aharonovitch, became Minister of Tourism (Knesset 2015a). Yisrael Beiteinu had made the visa-agreement a condition for joining the ruling coalition (Khanin 2013, 74). Finally, both Prime Minister Sharon and Olmert are from Russian or Soviet descent. Although not formally representing the Russian diaspora, their background undoubtedly has contributed to the strengthening of (general) ties with Russia.

**Ideological proximity**

Unlike the 1990s, which had been relatively quiet for all states except Russia, this time-period was predominated by conflict, both within states and between them. While the United States sent troops to Afghanistan and Iraq, Israel was first battling the Second Intifada (2000-2005) and then the Second Lebanon War (2006). Russia was still entangled in its battle against the Chechen insurgents and fought a short war with Georgia in 2008. With the exception of the Georgia War and the Iraq War,\(^\text{41}\) the states all fought (as some claim) a common enemy: Islamic-inspired terrorism (Katz 2005, 54; Mearsheimer & Waltz 2007, 60-61). Strong offensive measures were taken to counter this terrorism in the Global War on Terror. This may be (part of) the reason why Sharon and Olmert established good working

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\(^{38}\) P5+1 refers to all of the UN Security Council permanent members (the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, China, France) and Germany.

\(^{39}\) Yisrael B’aliya had merged with Likud after the elections in 2003.

\(^{40}\) Member of Knesset

\(^{41}\) Iraq was suspected of possessing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and being connected to Al Qaeda, but evidence for both assumptions was never found.
relationships with both their Russian and US counterparts (Katz 2005, 54; Ynetnews 2008; WikiLeaks 2006a).

Sharon and Russian President Vladimir Putin allegedly even established a “genuine bond”. As Katz describes it: “[Sharon and Putin] share a similar mindset about their Muslim opponents: they are terrorists with whom there can be no negotiation. Both Putin and Sharon use force against opponents they believe undeserving of sympathy, and both share a bond formed by their resulting vilification in the West” (2005, 59).

5.4 Phase 3: The Obama administration

Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia

Israel-Russia ties continued to grow stronger after the formation of a new Israeli government in 2009, when Benjamin Netanyahu became prime minister for the second time. It was however the new Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman that, already in the run up to the elections, announced that Russia would be a new “foreign policy priority” of Israel (WikiLeaks 2009d). In an interview with a Russian radio station, Lieberman said that as foreign minister he planned to “elevate Israeli-Russian relations to the same level as Israeli-U.S. relations” (WikiLeaks 2009b).

Lieberman, during a meeting with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Saltanov, furthermore “stressed improved bilateral relations and an upgrade in the Israel-Russia strategic dialogue, while seeking assurances on the sale of advanced weaponry to Syria and Iran” (ibid.). Saltanov responded by reiterating Russia’s position that it would only “provide “defensive weapons” to those countries, and would not sell them anything that would alter the strategic balance in the region” (ibid.).

WikiLeaks cables reveal that Russian officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in their turn welcomed the new foreign minister. Israeli Ambassador [to Russia] Azeri was quoted as saying to the [US] Ambassador [to Russia] that “the Russians consider Lieberman “their guy”. They feel they know him; they like and understand his “aggressive” way of presenting his case” (2009e). Moreover, Lieberman would always speak Russian during meetings, which would often “[be] attended exclusively by Lieberman’s Russian-speaking advisors” (2009b).

The general upsurge in political relations is further illustrated by the fact that five Israeli ministers travelled to Moscow within three months after the formation of the new government. As it is described in one of the leaked WikiLeaks cables: “Israeli politicians and
diplomats are a regular presence in Moscow and Sochi, where they meet Medvedev, Putin, and [Russian Foreign Minister] Lavrov, typically to stress Israeli concern over Iran and Syria as well as to discuss bilateral matters” (2009f).

Besides the increasing socio-cultural and economic ties following the formation of Israel’s new government, the bilateral relationship also started to get a strategic character when in September 2010 a military cooperation agreement was signed by the defense ministers of Russia and Israel (Russia Today 2010; Karasova 2013, ). The agreement consisted of a five year plan to strengthen military ties and “to help [Israel and Russia] fight common threats, such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction” (ibid.). It also specified that Russia would buy 12 UAVs from Israel, as well as a potentiality “to build a joint facility where those drones will be built”, because of “Russia’s expressed desire to participate in [the] manufacturing of the UAVs” (ibid.). Although not specified in the agreement, it allegedly also included increased intelligence cooperation between Israel and Russia (ibid.). The Israeli newspaper Haaretz connected the UAV deal to Israel’s security concerns, stating that “this deal will benefit Israeli ties with Russia, “an important country in international efforts to contain Iran’s nuclear program” (Haaretz 2010).

In 2012 Putin made his second presidential visit to Israel. He was accompanied by “an entourage of about 400 ministers, advisers, security personnel and journalists” (The Guardian 2012). Although the official intent of the visit was a memorial dedicated to the Soviet-Jewish Red Army soldiers, it was Iran’s nuclear program that would dominate bilateral talks (ibid.).

Indeed, Israel’s concerns on Iran only grew stronger in this phase, as negotiations did not yield any satisfactory results and Iran continued its uranium enrichment. In light of this, Netanyahu in November 2013 made his fifth visit to Moscow since assuming his second premiership in 2009. With the deadline for the P5+1 negotiations on Tehran’s nuclear program only a couple of days away, Netanyahu sought to push Russia – as a member of the P5+1 – for harder sanctions on Iran (Haaretz 2013).

In the margins of this visit, Foreign Minister Lieberman for the first time spoke openly about the need for Israel to look for new allies (The Jerusalem Post 2013b). He was

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42 It should be noted that while Israel-Russia trade amounted $2 billion in 2012, Israel-US trade constituted $45 billion that same year. Israel-Russian economic ties should thus not be overstated (Jerusalem Post 2013a; Office of the United States Trade Representative 2014).
43 Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak in the margins of the agreement said that Israel had followed “closely the situation with terrorism in Russia’s North Caucasus, because both Russia and Israel are under the threat of radical Islamic terrorism” (ibid.).
44 Unmanned aerial vehicles/drones. The sale of these 12 UAVs followed an earlier $50 million purchase of Israeli drones by Russia in 2009 (Haaretz 2010).
quoted as saying that “the Americans have a lot of problems and challenges around the world and … at home”, followed by “Israel’s foreign policy for many years went in one direction toward Washington, but my policy has more directions” (ibid.). Although he did not mention it specifically, Israeli officials have indicated that “diplomatic outreach is principally focused on Moscow, which Jerusalem views as the ultimate source of leverage on Iran in the P5+1 talks” (Defense News 2013). Meanwhile, Netanyahu concluded his visit to Moscow with a statement emphasizing “shared values, common interests and his personal “friendship” with Putin, which [were] already resulting in “closer, warmer, more intimate and productive” bilateral ties” (ibid.). These ties were reinforced further in January 2014, when the Russian government announced that a secure line would be established between Putin and Netanyahu to allow for “direct and encrypted” communication between the state leaders (Ynetnews 2014).

A further illustration of improved political ties followed in March 2014, when Israel abstained from a UN General Assembly vote condemning Russia’s annexation of the Crimea earlier that month (The Atlantic 2014a). This did not go unnoticed by the United States, that had voted in favor of the Resolution. As US State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki stated: “We were surprised that Israel did not join the vast majority of countries that vowed to support Ukraine’s territorial integrity in the United Nations” (The Atlantic 2014b). This meant the second breach with the United States, after Israel had also failed to criticize Russia in light of the Ukraine Crisis (The Economist 2014). Indeed, Israel even agreed to export its fruit to Russia, after the latter in light of its diplomatic spat with the West had decided to boycott European products (Haaretz 2014b).

**Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions**

A couple of months before the formation of Israel’s new government, Barack Obama assumed office as the new president of the United States. His foreign policy, especially regarding the Middle East, differed drastically from that of his predecessor Bush (Akbarzadeh 2011). Obama’s first visit to the region was to Cairo, where he spoke of “a new beginning” for the United States and the Muslim world (Obama 2009). His recognition of the Palestinian suffering in the same speech sparked Israeli concerns (Eligür 2014, 282-23). The Obama administration took a rather critical stance on Israel, urging it to move on the peace process and demanding a full settlement freeze upon entering the White House (Zanotti 2014). WikiLeaks cables reveal that there was also a sense of disconnect immediately following Obama’s entrance of the White House, as
“… senior officials in Jerusalem expressed concern … over the sharp decline in the coordination between Israel and the United States on security and state affairs since President Obama entered the White House and especially since the formation of Israel’s new government. Senior White House officials told their Israeli counterparts that Obama will demand Netanyahu completely suspend construction in the settlements, the officials were quoted as saying. “Obama’s people brief their Israeli counterparts in advance much less about security and Middle East policy activities than the Bush administration used to,” the officials said. In addition, when they do brief Israeli officials, they don’t consult with them or coordinate their statements in advance. This has caused several coordination “malfunctions” between the two states in the past two months, they said. The last incident was the statement of Assistant U.S. Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller, calling on Israel to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.” (2009c)

The Obama administration thus took a highly critical stance on Israel’s settlement policy, demanding an immediate settlement freeze. This caught the Israeli government by surprise, as many of them had considered Bush’s ‘Letter of Assurances’ as legitimizing these settlements. A diplomatic spat occurred in March 2010 when a visit of US Vice President Joseph Biden coincided with the Israeli Ministry of Interior’s announcement of 1,600 new housing units (The New York Times 2010). In 2014, the existing rift widened when the Obama administration in strong words condemned the announcement of more housing constructions, warning Israel that “the new project would distance Israel from even its closest allies and raise questions about its commitment to seeking peace with Palestinians” (Haaretz 2015).

This marks the other sore point in the relation between the Israeli government and the Obama administration. Whereas Bush – except for the very beginning and very end of his presidency – had left this topic largely untouched, the Obama administration made clear from the start that progress needed to be made on the MEPP (The Washington Post 2010). US led negotiations in 2013-2014 broke down shortly before the deadline. Many Israeli leaders, among who Israeli Defense Minister Ya’alon, blamed Abbas, who in their view was “not a partner for peace” (Times of Israel 2014a).

Obama’s Iran policy also differed greatly from that of Bush. Whereas the latter, especially in the early years of his presidency, had maintained a tough stance that included the imposition of sanctions and with a military option firmly on the table, Obama’s policy was one of engagement (Akbarzadeh 2011, 161-175). This caused friction between the two allies, as the Iranian President Ahmadinejad continued to calls for Israel’s destruction (The
Atlantic 2011). Although the United States made it clear to Israel that it opposed a nuclear Iran just as much as Israel did, many Israelis felt that the implications of a nuclear Iran were far more threatening for them than for the United States. Therefore, Netanyahu demanded that Iran’s nuclear program be completely dismantled (Times of Israel 2013). When the P5+1 and Iran announced their interim agreement in November 2013, Netanyahu called this “a historic mistake” (The Guardian 2013b).

Related to the issue of Iran were Israeli concerns of the US’ waning position in the Middle East. After the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US position and credibility in the region deteriorated further during the Arab Spring. This sparked Israeli concern, as its security and deterrence in large part depended on a strong and credible United States (Inbar 2012, 62-63). As a former director-general of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: “The world detects a chronic American weakness and reluctance to pull the trigger. No one is afraid of Obama” (The Economist 2014). Obama’s announcement of the US’ “pivot to Asia” implied an ever further decline of the US position in the Middle East (Reuters 2011).

All the aforementioned conflicting views contributed to increasing tensions between the Israeli government and the Obama administration since 2009. Unlike in earlier times, those disagreements translated into personal insults and, according to former US Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer, even resulted in “the worst political ties” in the history of Israel-US relations (Haaretz 2014a).

Despite these strongly deteriorated political ties, US military aid to Israel actually increased from $2,55 billion in 2009 to $3,1 billion in 2014 (Sharp 2014, 26). The same applied for intelligence cooperation (Haaretz 2014a). Finally, the United States also continued to support Israel in the UN Security Council. Two Resolutions were blocked because the United States vetoed it or voted against it (U.S. Department of State).

**Preserving nuclear deterrence**

As Obama’s policy of engagement and his outspoken preference for diplomacy rendered a military strike ever more distant,45 Iran became an even higher priority on Israel’s foreign policy agenda.46 Israel was particularly worried about the diplomatic approach, with negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 starting in April 2012 (Arms Control Association 2014).

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45 Obama, in a speech to Congress on January 28 2015, called war on Iran “a last resort” (The Jerusalem Post 2015).
With a great lack of confidence in a desirable outcome of the negotiations Israel increasingly sought to persuade Russia to reconsider the transfer of S-300 defense systems to Iran, that had not yet been delivered after reaching a deal in 2006. As diplomatic cables leaked by WikiLeaks reveal, Israeli officials would visit Russia first and foremost to discuss Israeli concerns on Iran (2009f). In November 2013, Netanyahu travelled to Moscow to urge Putin “to set tough terms for Iran in any deal reached in the standoff over Tehran’s nuclear program” (Haaretz 2013).

**Russian diaspora in Israel**

Yisrael Beiteinu continued to gain political power after the elections in 2009 when the party acquired 15 seats, making it the third party in Knesset. This resulted in five ministerial posts and one deputy ministerial post. Avigdor Lieberman assumed the post of foreign minister (Knesset 2015b).

The party became even more powerful after it merged with Likud in the run up to the 2013 elections. With a total of 31 seats (27 for Likud, 15 for Yisrael Beiteinu), the joint faction was by far the largest party in Knesset. Yisrael Beiteinu retained the same amount of (deputy) ministerial posts. Avigdor Lieberman remained his position as foreign minister (Knesset 2015c).

**Ideological proximity**

Israel’s nationalist (Zionist) ideology continued to exist in the third (current) phase, indeed, even grew stronger due to the (far) right government. In Russia, growing nationalism was illustrated by its annexation of the Crimea, “a territory with an ethnic Russian majority” (The Guardian 2014). Although perhaps not (as) outspoken as under Sharon/Putin, mutual appreciation between Netanyahu and Putin existed on their “no nonsense” policies, while also sharing a similar view on how to deal with terrorism. As Kurtzer and Levy pointed out, Israel and Russia furthermore appreciate the non-interference; whereas the United States and the European Union are the first one to criticize Israel when it announces new settlements, as well as Russia for its role in the Ukraine crisis and lack of human rights (Kurtzer 2015; Levy 2014).

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47 These posts included foreign minister, minister of immigrant absorption and minister of tourism (Knesset 2015b). The character of these ministerial posts facilitated further strengthening of ties with Russia.

48 Among these posts were again the position of foreign minister, minister of immigrant absorption and minister of tourism (2015c).
Whereas Israeli and US state leaders in the previous phase had shared a similar political outlook, as well as an appreciation for each other, the current phase was characterized by significantly differing views and a complete mismatch on the personal level. The different political outlook/ideology became most evident on the topic of Iran whereas Israel advocated a military attack, Obama adopted a policy of engagement, including diplomatic measures such as negotiations. Mismatch in ideas on: preferred action/what was good/in best interest (where previously this had been much more synchronized) between Israel and the Obama administration.
6. ANALYSIS

After the presentation of the case studies in the previous chapter, now the cross-case and within-case analyses will be conducted to assess the validity of the hypotheses and to establish a causal mechanism for each phase. The chapter will conclude with an overview of the main (general) findings.

6.1 Cross-case analyses

Based on the previously determined SFC questions, the cases can be summarized as follows:

Table 4: SFC-analysis

| SFC question                                                                 | Phase 1                              | Phase 2                             | Phase 3                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|                                    |                                    |
| Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia (DV)                             | moderate                             | strong                              | strong                              |
| mainly socio-cult. and economic, not political/strategic                      | mainly economic, socio-cultural, some strategic/milit (terr.) |                                    |                                    |
| Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions (IV)                    | favorable                            | favorable                           | unfavorable                         |
| - Perceived Israel and MEPP intentions                                       | Israel: uncritical                   | Israel: largely uncrit.             | Israel: critical                    |
| - Perceived Iran and Middle East intentions                                   | MEPP: n/a                            | MEPP: no pressure                   | MEPP: pressure                      |
| - US bilateral aid                                                            | Iran: tough                         | Iran: tough                         | Iran: weak                          |
|                                | Middle East: strong presence         | Middle East: strong presence        | Middle East: pivot to Asia          |
| Preserving nuclear deterrence (RT1)                                          | Israel expresses                    | Israel tries to halt                | Israel tries to halt                |
|                                | concerns, but S-300 not an issue yet | S-300 deal/transfer through meetings | S-300 transfer through meetings     |
|                                |                                       | and through actions                  | and through agreements              |
| Russian diaspora In Israel (RT2)                                              | no/negligible                        | some political                      | very powerful                        |
|                                | political power                      | power                               | politically                          |
| Ideological proximity (RT3)                                                   | ’91-’96 similar to US, similar nor different from Russia | similar to US and Russia | different from US, similar to Russia |

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Now that the answers to the SFC questions have been established, the hypotheses can be tested.

**IV: Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions**

*H1.1: The more critical the United States is perceived to be on Israel, and the more it pressures Israel to move on the peace process, the more Israel will feel inclined to hedge.*

*H1.2: The tougher the perceived US position towards Iran and the greater the perceived US presence in the Middle East, the lesser Israel’s inclination to hedge.*

*H1.3: The more military, economic and diplomatic aid Israel receives of the United States, the lesser Israel’s inclination to hedge.*

Working on the premise that hedging behavior is indicated by strategic (military and strong economic) ties, H1.2 is supported. H1.1 is supported to the extent that it does apply in phase 2 and 3, but not in phase 1 where there simply was no need to be critical on Israel or exert pressure on it, as the Israeli government itself (that is to say, Rabin and Peres) sought to freeze settlement construction as well as reaching a peace deal. Evidence from the case studies largely refutes H1.3, as higher military aid (in phase 3) is accompanied by an increase in strategic ties between Israel and Russia, which is an indication of hedging behavior. This is the opposite of what the hypothesis predicts.

**RT1: Preserving nuclear deterrence**

*H2: The stronger Israel seeks to preserve its nuclear deterrence through Russia, the more Israel will try to please Russia.*

H2 is supported to the extent that in phase 2 and 3, in which Israel sought to preserve its nuclear deterrence through Russia more than in phase 1, general ties were stronger. It nonetheless remains difficult to assess which actions or agreements were completely (or partly) conducted and/or signed to prevent Russia’s delivery of the S-300 defense systems, as this is most often not made explicit. Indeed, as WikiLeaks cables reveal, even when Israel cancelled its arms sales to Georgia in 2008 – which is widely assumed to be linked to the S-300 deal – Israel itself did not explicitly mention a relation.
RT2: Russian diaspora in Israel

H3: The more political power Russian political parties have, the more Israel will seek to strengthen socio-cultural and economic ties with Russia.

This hypothesis is also partly confirmed, as an increase of political power is accompanied by stronger socio-cultural and economic ties (in phase 2 and 3). Phase 1 does however show that political representation is not a necessity for the emergence of such relations. A distinction should furthermore be made between the strengthening of ties on the government level (which becomes increasingly likely if a Russian party takes seat in the government), and strengthened ties as a result from transnational activities of the diaspora itself (on a non-governmental level).

RT3: Ideological proximity

H4.1: The more similar Israel and Russia’s ideology, the more Israel will seek to strengthen ties with Russia.

H4.2: The more dissimilar Israel’s ideology with the United States and the more similar Israel’s ideology with Russia, the more Israel will seek to strengthen ties with Russia.

Both hypotheses are supported: whereas (general) ties have grown stronger when Israel’s and Russia’s ideology became more alike in phase 2, they grew even more strong in phase 3, when Israel and Russia had a similar ideology that conflicted with the ideology of the United States.

6.2 Within-case analyses

Phase 1: Restoration Israel-Russia ties – Inauguration Bush

After diplomatic ties were resumed in 1991, Israel and Russia mainly developed socio-cultural and economic relations. The relationship did not have a political or strategic character in this phase.

Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions

In the period from October 1991 until January 2001 the United States enjoyed unprecedented global leadership. US intentions, in all three respects, were perceived by Israeli decision makers as highly favorable (to Israel’s security). The above would indicate that Israel during this period had no incentive to hedge. This is confirmed when looking at the Israel-Russia
relations, which in this phase did not have a strategic character: there were no military ties (except for the coproduction of an AWACS radar aircraft) and economic relations were marginal compared to those with the United States (and should thus not be overstated). In theoretical terms, this means that in Tessman’s mechanism (Figure A.1) Israel’s behavior would fail to meet the first condition already.

Preserving nuclear deterrence

The only occasion in this phase where there may have been a link between Israel’s desire to maintain its nuclear monopoly (and thus deterrence) and its relationship with Russia, was when Netanyahu withdrew a proposal to buy Russian gas, after learning that Russia had assisted Iran in its nuclear program. This however concerned a reaction to something that had already happened (instead of seeking to prevent something from happening, as is the case with the S-300), and this decision should therefore not be regarded as an attempt to preserve nuclear deterrence but rather as Israeli sending Russia a signal that is opposes this nuclear collaboration.

Russian diaspora in Israel

In this phase close to one million Russian immigrants moved to Israel. Even though Russian political parties were only established in 1996 and 1999, and their power was negligible until 2001, the diaspora’s mere presence greatly affected Israel-Russia ties. This effect was twofold: besides increasing Israel-Russia ties (socio-culturally and economically) themselves – through their transnational activities – they also provided an incentive for the governments to increase cooperation in several areas as well as economic ties. Phase one thus shows that political representation of the Russian diaspora is not necessary to affect (enhance) ties between the homeland and the host land.

Ideological proximity

Israel’s Zionist ideology knew two variants during this time: a dovish one under Rabin/Peres and a hawkish one under Netanyahu. Whereas the former variant was close to that of the United States, the latter one actually came closer to that of Russia under Putin (from 2000 onwards). This proximity with Russia would however not (yet) be acknowledged by Netanyahu in this phase. The “acceleration of [economic Israel-Russia] ties” that was agreed on in 1997 (when Yeltsin was still president) therefore is unlikely to have resulted from an ideological proximity with Russia.
Summary

Israel-Russia relations evolved from no ties in 1991 to rather strong socio-cultural and decent economic ties in 2001. These ties are best explained as a product of on the one hand the (mere presence of the) Russian diaspora, and on the other hand of the normalization process after the Cold War. Hedging did not occur as Israel’s perception of US intentions were highly favorable and Israel continued to rely completely on the United States in terms of public goods such as security and economic welfare. The preservation of its nuclear deterrence was not something Israel sought to accomplish through Russia during this period, nor was there an ideological proximity with Russia in this phase, that could account for (or contribute to) stronger ties.

Figure 3: Causal mechanism phase 1

IV

Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions

(security; s-d level)

DV

Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia

Rival theory 1
Preserving nuclear deterrence
(security; s-d level)

Rival theory 2
Russian diaspora in Israel
(culture/identity; d. level)

Rival theory 3
Ideological proximity
(security/ident; d. level)
Phase 2: Bush administration

Israel-Russia ties improved during this period, especially in the first years under Putin and Sharon. As becomes clear from Table 4, socio-cultural and economic ties grew stronger, while the 2008 visa agreement facilitated the ‘flourishing tourism’. In 2008 Israel adopted a very moderate stance to Russia’s conflict with Georgia and even halted its arms sales to Georgia when Russia requested this. Although Israel did sell drones to Russia and the states cooperated in the field of counterterrorism, the relationship did not have a military or strategic character.

Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions

The evidence in this phase indicates that Israel in this phase had little incentive to hedge, that is: to strengthen ties with Russia in anticipation of potentially adverse consequences of a relative decline in US power. Indeed, throughout most of the period US intentions were perceived by Israeli decision makers just as favorable as they had been in the first phase. Only at the beginning and very end of his presidency, Bush tried to revitalize the MEPP. Regarding Iran he also started to lean more towards diplomacy at the end of his second term. Therefore, if Israel hedged in this phase, it would be at the end of this phase (2007/2008). No unusual increase is however seen in Israel’s behavior towards Russia in those last years.

The decision to stop selling weapons to Georgia in 2008 should not be regarded as related to this variable, given that Israel would want to prevent this deal in any case (because it would impede a military strike from everyone).

Regarding the economic ties; they indeed improved, which according to Tessman’s model could form proof for Type B hedging (see Figure A.1), especially after the United States stopped its annual economic grant. However, although in theory one could argue that this did improve Israel’s ability (to cope without US public goods and financial assistance), it was still no comparison with Israel’s economic ties with the United States. Therefore, it can be concluded that Israel did not hedge during this phase.

Preserving nuclear deterrence

For Israel, the Iranian threat became more imminent in this phase as Iran enriched uranium for the first time in 2006 and signed a contract that same year to buy Russian S-300 defense systems. While Israel continued to express its concerns on Iran during bilateral meetings with Russian officials, it also sought to preserve its nuclear deterrence through Russia in a more practical fashion. Indeed, Israel’s decision to stop selling weapons to Georgia in 2008 came at
the same time as it tried to persuade Russia to not deliver the S-300 to Iran. Although no explicit link was made, this was most likely an attempt of Israel to please Russia and create goodwill. The same applies for Israel’s very moderate reaction to the Georgia war, in comparison with the reactions of the United States and the European Union, who fiercely criticized Russia.

**Russian diaspora in Israel**

When Yisrael B’aliya merged with Likud in 2003, Yisrael Beiteinu remained as the sole ‘Russian party’. After the 2006 elections it became the fifth party in Knesset, and a visa-free agreement between Israel and Russia – that was implement in 2008 – was one of the party’s conditions for joining the ruling coalition. Besides this concrete agreement, the party also sought to strengthen the existing socio-cultural and economic ties that had emerged in the 1990s.

**Ideological proximity**

Israel’s ideology was rather similar to that of both Russia and the United States, as all countries (due to circumstances) became rather (or even more) nationalistic, while also deploying offensive measures. The Israeli leaders furthermore considered their enemies to be the same as those of Russia and the United States, namely Islamic-inspired terrorists. Under Sharon and Putin, this overlap in ideology led them to cooperate in the field of counterterrorism, while the personal friendship between the leaders also gave rise to increasing socio-cultural and economic ties.

**Summary**

In the period from 2001 to 2009, Israel sought to strengthen existing ties with Russia in the socio-cultural and economic realm, while also agreeing to cooperate in the field of counterterrorism. Yet, Israel-Russia ties have not yet reached a level where it can be considered hedging (as this would also imply deteriorated ties with the United States).

Ideological proximity (especially under Sharon and Putin) and the Russian diaspora (that had gained more political power) account for these ties. Israel also sought to prevent Russia from first selling and then delivering the S-300 systems to Iran. The fact that Israel sought to strengthen ties despite diplomatic spats with Russia, may also be interpreted as stemming from a desire to please Russia (and in that way prevent Russia from delivering the S-300 systems to Iran). Israel’s relationship with the United States is not assumed to have
played a role in this phase yet, as Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions remained favorable throughout (almost) the entire time-period.

**Figure 4: Causal mechanism phase 2**

**IV**
Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions
*(security; s-d level)*

**DV**
Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia

**Rival theory 1**
Preserving nuclear deterrence
*(security; s-d level)*

**Rival theory 2**
Russian diaspora in Israel
*(culture/identity; d. level)*

**Rival theory 3**
Ideological proximity
*(security/identity; d. level)*

**Phase 3: Obama administration**

Israel-Russia relations improved significantly in the last period. Besides growing socio-cultural and economic ties, the relation – for the first time – also got a strategic/military character. The most important illustration of the latter aspect of the relationship is the comprehensive five year military agreement that was signed in 2010. Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with (or please) Russia, is furthermore illustrated by its abstention from the UN General Assembly vote in March 2014 and its moderate reaction to and economic support for Russia in the margins of the Ukraine conflict. This also illustrates a breach with the United States, as the latter had strongly criticized Russia and experienced the worst ties with this country since the end of the Cold War.
Looking at the third phase and applying the results to Tessman’s hedging mechanism (Figure A.1), it can be concluded that in this phase there was an incentive for Israel to hedge. This conclusion is based on Israel’s relationship with the United States, that sharply deteriorated in this period. The deterioration stemmed from disagreements between the Obama administration and the Israeli government in areas that Israel considered vital to its national security. Especially Iran was a sore point, as Obama deployed a policy of engagement while Netanyahu sought to keep the military option on the table (which is also shown in its determination to halt Russia from transferring the S-300 systems to Iran). In other words, Israel increasingly felt that the United States – that had announced a pivot to Asia – would not be able to provide Israel with the public good it needed so badly: security. This perception was increased by the US critical stance on Israel – both in terms of its settlement polices and the MEPP – as well as the US weakening position and credibility in the Middle East.

There thus was an incentive to hedge, given that Israel’s relationship with the US had deteriorated sharply while Israel-Russia relations were increasing, and even becoming strategic. However, as PT is a method to uncover causality, the mere recognition of Israel’s strained (political) relations with the United States on the one hand, and good relations with Russia on the other hand, is not enough. What needs to be established instead, is whether the latter follows the former.

From the case studies it became clear that disagreements and “malfunctions” between the Israeli and US government occurred almost immediately after Obama entered the White House. Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia also emerged in this phase resulting in stronger economic ties and with a comprehensive five year military agreement signed in 2013. Furthermore, Lieberman in 2013 explicitly stated Israel’s need to look for other allies, as the United States had redirected its focus to Asia and faced challenges at home. Although he did not mention it specifically, no one seems to doubt that his diplomatic outreach will be focus first and foremost on Moscow. This and the above leads to the conclusion that Israel, besides having an incentive to hedge, indeed deployed this specific security strategy.

**Preserving nuclear deterrence**

In this phase, Israel was even more concerned about Iran, as it continued its uranium enrichment activities and the P5+1 negotiations – in Netanyahu’s view – did not lead to satisfying results. During bilateral meetings Israel urged Russia to be tough on Iran and to
impose harder sanctions, while simultaneously continuing its efforts to persuade Russia from delivering the S-300 systems. Although this phase is not characterized by an ‘obvious’ Russia-pleasing action as in the prior phase (when Israel halted its arms sales to Georgia), some contend that Israel has sought to create goodwill by agreeing to Russian cooperation proposals. This is however not a certainty since these specific (cooperation) agreements can also stem from a hedging behavior (or a combination of both).

**Russian diaspora in Israel**

The elections in 2009 brought even more power to the Russian diaspora. From the case studies it becomes clear that Avigdor Lieberman actively sought to strengthen Israel-Russia (strategic) ties, indeed, even sought to lift them to the same level as the United States. WikiLeaks cables reveal that Lieberman and his party have created a platform from which ties were strengthened in the socio-cultural, economic (including innovation and hi-tech), and potentially even in the strategic realm. Regarding the latter, it is unlikely that this sole variable accounted for this development, but it can be assumed to have at the very least contributed to it.

**Ideological proximity**

In the last phase there is a clear breach in ideology between Israel and the United States while Israel and Russia have rather similar ideologies. It is very difficult to assess if and how exactly this has affected growing ties between Israel and Russia. It seems plausible that this variable has interfered with the IV in this phase, and that therefore the breach with the United States (in terms of ideology) has increased Israel’s incentive to hedge.

**Summary**

Israel-Russia relations in the current phase improved in all domains and even got a strategic character. This improvement can be explained only by taking into account all of the four causal variables. The strategic character of the military and strong economic ties can firstly be explained as a result from its deteriorated political ties with the United States (and the consequence that Israel seeks to diversify its dependencies). Certain agreements may also be stemming from a general Israeli wish to please Russia (by, for example, selling UAVs to Russia), as a means of preventing the delivery of the S-300 defense systems. While Avigdor Lieberman personally sought to start a strategic dialogue with Russia, his influence is more likely to explain increasing economic and socio-cultural ties, as well as other cooperative
(high tech) agreements. Ideological proximity, finally, is not a main explanatory variable in the improved ties, but has presumably contributed to all of the improvements and strengthened the inclination to hedge.

**Figure 5: Causal mechanism phase 3**

![Diagram of causal mechanism phase 3]

**Summary main findings**

Israel’s relationship with Russia has gradually evolved from having a predominantly socio-cultural (phase 1) and economic character (phase 2), to an increasingly strategic character, particularly in the military realm (phase 3). The changes in and intensification of the relationship since 1991 can be explained by an increasing number of causal variables over the years.

Whereas ties in the first phase were the product of only one variable – the Russian diaspora – two more causal variables (preserving nuclear deterrence; ideological proximity) were added in the subsequent phase. In the third phase, a fourth causal variable – the IV –
added another layer to Israel-Russia relations. Israel’s relation with Russia thus went from single-layered to multilayered over the course of its 23 years of existence.

The conclusion that Israel in the third phase conducted a hedging strategy was based first and foremost on Israel’s relation with the United States and its perceptions of the US intentions in particular.

Further interesting findings, conclusions and remarks are the following:
- Where the IV is assumed to have caused the hedging behavior, the far right wing character of the Israeli government presumably also has played a role. In phase 1 it became clear that the left Israeli government did not perceive a US desire to reach a solution on the MEPP as
- Military bilateral aid was not a decisive factor in Israel’s decision to hedge, as hedging occurred in the third phase when US military aid was the highest.
- Whereas Daniel Kurtzer expected Israel’s behavior to stem predominantly from its dissatisfaction with the Obama administration (thus indicating the hedging behavior as a short term solution), Daniel Levy actually did foresee a longer term problematic relationship between Israel and the United States.
7. CONCLUSION

Israel’s puzzling behavior vis-à-vis Russia and the United States formed the starting point of this thesis. This behavior became visible in 2009, when Israel became closer to Russia – a friend of Israel’s adversaries Iran and Syria – while simultaneously starting to experience deteriorating political ties with the United States. In order to establish an explanation for this puzzling behavior this study has investigated Israel’s relationship with Russia since 1991, with a special emphasis on the last six years. It especially sought to explain Israel’s motives in its relationship with Russia and whether or not its behavior resulted from a hedging strategy.

Prior to the actual study, that consisted of three phases, theoretical explanations from previous research were provided. These were translated into variables and testable hypotheses. The first variable (IV) was derived from the starting point of the study – Israel’s behavior vis-à-vis Russia and the United States – and pertained to the earlier mentioned hedging strategy. The other variables – or rival theories – included Israel’s wish to maintain its nuclear deterrence (RT1), the influence of the Russian diaspora in Israel (RT2) and ideological proximity (RT3). The variables concerned either systemic-domestic (IV, RT1) or domestic level explanations (RT2, RT3), and were security driven (IV, RT1), non-security driven (RT2), or potentially/partly security driven (RT2).

The scope of the study was twofold. First it wanted to establish whether or not Israel’s behavior vis-à-vis Russia (since the last six years) resulted from a hedging strategy. The second goal of the study was to establish a causal mechanism for Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia for each of the three phases. Hence, to unravel for each phase which variables accounted for Israel’s behavior vis-à-vis Russia.

The case studies and analyses revealed that in the third phase, Israel’s behavior could indeed be interpreted as hedging behavior. This conclusion is based both on increasing ties between Israel and Russia in the strategic realm, but perhaps even more so on Israeli decision makers’ perceptions of US intentions, that are conceived as highly unfavorable to Israel’s security. Whereas Israel’s behavior at this moment can be seen as hedging behavior, both Kurtzer and Levy emphasized that with another US president or Israeli government, the situation could change drastically. In other words, that the strategic hedging was not so much a result of a long term expectation, but more of a temporary solution to a problem.
Regarding the first and the second phase, it was found that Israel’s wish to strengthen ties with Russia became increasingly complex and multilayered. Indeed, did in phase one only the Russian diaspora account for Israel’s behavior, in phase two it was accompanied by two additional causal variables: Israel’s wish to preserve its nuclear deterrence and ideological proximity. Finally, in phase three it was found that all four variables contributed to Israel’s behavior vis-à-vis Russia, which constituted strategic hedging.

A clarification of the aforementioned results can be given by answering the question: how does Israel perceive Russia: as a foe, a friend, or family? Whereas in the first phase Russia, as the country of origin of Israel’s Russian diaspora, could be considered ‘family’ (albeit distant), in the second phase Russia also occurred as a foe and a friend. A foe in the sense that it maintained close ties with Iran – Israel’s sworn enemy – which it helped developing its nuclear program and which it even wanted to provide with weaponry that could render an Israeli (or US) military strike ineffective. A friend in the sense that they shared the same ideas and ideology.

As became clear in the case studies and the analyses, these perspectives and the behaviors stemming from it, would also interfere. It is for example highly likely, that behaviors attributed to certain explanations, actually stemmed. For example, Israeli-Russian economic cooperation assumed to stem from the influence of the Russian diaspora, could also be regarded as stemming from Israel’s wish to create goodwill (either to halt the S-300 transfer or as part of a hedging strategy). This leads to the conclusion that, although both security and non-security (such as cultural/identity) explanations played a role, security driven explanations

With this research I have sought to make an academic contribution by establishing an integrative historical overview of Israel-Russia relations that is embedded in theoretical explanations. A specific contribution lies in the application of the hedging theory, which thus far had not been discussed in relation to Israel. Although it was found that Israel’s behavior in the current phase can be considered strategic hedging, this result is preliminary and additional research is needed. Indeed, as both Kurtzer and Levy indicated, Israel’s current behavior may not stem from a long term strategy, but rather from a short term solution. In other words, the ‘crisis’ that now exists between Israel and the United States, may evaporate as soon as new leaders enter office. Would this however also change Israel’s behavior towards Russia? With Israeli elections coming up in two months and a new US president entering the White House within two years, the answer to these questions is not far away. In the meantime it can be expected that Israel-Russia relations will only continue to grow.
APPENDIX
Figure A.1: Mechanism for identifying strategic hedging (Tessman 2012, 210)

UNIVERSE OF STATE BEHAVIOR

FILTER ONE
Does behavior improve the competitive ability of the actor should it enter into a militarized dispute with the system leader?
(Type A hedging)

OR

Does behavior improve the ability of the actor to cope without specific public goods or subsidies that are currently being provided to it by the system leader?
(Type B hedging)

Yes

FILTER TWO
Does behavior avoid direct confrontation of the system leader via the formation of an explicit military alliance aimed at the system leader (external balancing), or via a significant arms build-up that is meant to challenge the system leader (internal balancing?)

Yes

FILTER THREE
Is behavior strategic in the sense that it is developed, funded and coordinated at the highest levels of government? Does it involve an issue area that has been explicitly recognized as of major national security interest by the highest levels of government in the relevant state?

Yes

BEHAVIOR IS AN EXAMPLE OF STRATEGIC HEDGING
Profile Daniel Kurtzer

Daniel C. Kurtzer is the S. Daniel Abraham Professor of Middle East policy studies at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

Following a 29-year career in the U.S. Foreign Service, Kurtzer retired in 2005 with the rank of Career-Minister. From 2001-2005 he served as the United States Ambassador to Israel and from 1997-2001 as the United States Ambassador to Egypt. He served as a political officer at the American embassies in Cairo and Tel Aviv, Deputy Director of the Office of Egyptian Affairs, speechwriter on the Policy Planning Staff, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research. Throughout his career, Kurtzer was instrumental in formulating and executing U.S. policy toward the Middle East peace process. Secretary of State John Kerry appointed Kurtzer to the Secretary's Foreign Affairs Policy Board. Governor Chris Christie appointed Kurtzer to serve on the New Jersey-Israel State Commission.

Previously, Kurtzer served as an advisor to the bipartisan Iraq Study Group, and as a member of the Advisory Council of the American Bar Association's Middle East Rule of Law Initiative. Kurtzer currently serves as a member of the Board of Trustees of the American University in Cairo; a member of the Board of Governors of the Middle East Institute; and a member of the Board of the National Library of Israel. He is the co-author of Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace: American Leadership in the Middle East; co-author of The Peace Puzzle: America’s Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace, 1989-2011; and editor of Pathways to Peace: America and the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Ph.D. Columbia University.49

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49 This profile was obtained from http://wws.princeton.edu/facultyresearch/faculty/dkurtzer.
Profile Daniel Levy

Daniel Levy is the Director of the Middle East and & North Africa program at the London based think tank ECFR (European Council on Foreign Relations). He is a senior research fellow at the New America Foundation and a senior fellow at The Century Foundation.

From 2003 to 2004 Daniel was an analyst for the International Crisis Group’s Middle East program. From 1999 to 2001 Daniel was special adviser and head of Jerusalem Affairs in the office of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak. He also served as senior policy adviser to Israeli Justice Minister Yossi Beilin, responsible for coordinating policy on issues including peace negotiations, civil and human rights, and the Palestinian minority in Israel.

Daniel was a member of the Israeli delegation to the 2001 Taba negotiations with the Palestinians and served on the Israeli negotiating team to the 1995 “Oslo B” agreement under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. He was the lead Israeli drafter of the Geneva Initiative, a joint Israeli-Palestinian effort suggesting a detailed model for a peace agreement to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Daniel received his BA and MA with Honors from King’s College, Cambridge. He went to Israel in 1991 as chair of the World Union of Jewish Students in Jerusalem, a position he served in until 1994, after which he spent a year in the Israeli Defense Forces as a non-commissioned officer. In the late 1990s, Daniel was projects director for the Economic Cooperation Foundation, a policy-planning think tank based in Tel Aviv.

Daniel is a founding editor of the Middle East Channel at foreignpolicy.com. He has written for many publications and regularly writes for TPM Café, The Huffington Post and the Guardian. He is also a regular (Middle East and National Security) commentator on TV and radio, including for the BBC, CNN, PBS, and Al Jazeera.50

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