

Netanyahu's psychological characteristics and its effect on Israel's approach to the Gaza war (2023)

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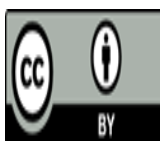
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1-Introduction

The integration of theoretical concepts and achievements from various branches of political psychology into the study of international relations enhances our ability to analyze and explain the phenomena of international politics. As the nature of a political system constrains the unchecked dominance of leaders over policy-making, and as leaders are compelled to operate within a framework of codified and internalized principles and laws, the role of individual actors in policy-making and its implementation diminishes. For instance, in the Federal Republic of Germany, the Basic Law, along with internalized democratic norms, a critical media landscape, and a pluralistic society, serve to limit unilateral actions by the government and the Chancellor. Conversely, in states where institutional constraints on leadership are weaker, the influence of individual leaders on foreign and security policy is amplified. Israel's unique political system presents such a case. Benjamin Netanyahu's exceptionally long tenure as Prime Minister (over 15 years) has significantly shaped Israeli policy, particularly in the realm of foreign and security affairs. The recent Gaza war, triggered by Operation Al-Aqsa Storm, resulted in widespread destruction, a reported death toll exceeding 40,000, and a profound humanitarian crisis. Israel's response under Netanyahu's leadership is widely characterized as aggressive, unilateral, and arguably reckless. This study therefore addresses two central questions: 1) What are

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Netanyahu's key psychological characteristics? and 2) How did these characteristics shape Israel's actions during the Gaza war?

2- Research Method and Theoretical Framework

This interdisciplinary research employs a descriptive-analytical methodology to examine the relationship between Netanyahu's psychological characteristics and Israel's unilateral and extremist actions during the Gaza War. The study first establishes the significant role of leaders in shaping Israeli policy, alongside structural factors. It then analyzes aspects of Israeli society to explore their correlation with the rise of the extreme right and Netanyahu's ascent to power. Finally, by examining Netanyahu's personality and psychological traits, the study analyzes and explains Israel's actions in the Gaza War through the lens of the impact of Netanyahu's personality on Israeli foreign policy.

This research employs concepts from cognitive psychology and the psychology of political leadership to analyze Netanyahu's cognitive and personality traits. The theoretical framework draws upon the work of Margaret Hermann and Alfred Adler, incorporating concepts such as cognitive coherence and cognitive dissonance. This multi-faceted approach, integrating individual and collective psychological theories, provides a robust theoretical foundation for examining the research question.

3- Discussion

This analysis highlights the critical interplay between leaders and structural factors in shaping policy, particularly within the context of Israel's political system. The emphasis on Benjamin Netanyahu as a central figure in Israeli foreign policy, especially following the events of October 7, underscores the importance of understanding his psychological characteristics in explaining Israel's unilateral actions during the Gaza war. Understanding the policies and approaches of Israel during the Gaza war necessitates a focus on Benjamin Netanyahu's psychological characteristics and their interaction with the political and social structures of the country. His central role in shaping foreign policy illustrates how individual leaders can significantly

influence national actions, particularly in times of crisis. The combination of a security-oriented political environment and Netanyahu's personal attributes creates a framework where unilateral actions are not only possible but often seen as necessary by both leadership and the public. This analysis underscores the importance of considering personality of leaders within broader structural contexts when examining policy formulation and implementation in Israel.

4- Conclusion and Suggestions

In this article, we aimed to elucidate Israel's approaches to the Gaza war through the lens of Benjamin Netanyahu's personality and psychological characteristics. The political landscape in Israel is marked by fragility and instability, particularly in the realm of foreign policy, where internal dynamics and structural inefficiencies often lead to significant fluctuations in policy direction. In such an environment, the influence of individual leaders becomes more pronounced, as seen in Netanyahu's prolonged tenure as Prime Minister.

Netanyahu's leadership reflects a broader acceptance of extremist ideologies within Israeli society and highlights the profound impact that the regime's foreign and security policies have on his decision-making. To comprehensively understand Israel's approach to the Gaza conflict, it is essential to consider Netanyahu's personality traits, which include:

1-Unilateralism and Self-conceit, 2. Rigid Cognitive Framework, 3. False Self-Confidence and subsequently a false sense of power, 4. Exaggerated Beliefs in one's own ability to control events, 5. In-Group Leadership and Prejudice.

These traits provide insight into Netanyahu's rejection of ceasefire proposals, his aggressive military strategies in Gaza, and his dismissal of both domestic pressures- such as the demands from families of hostages- and international calls for restraint, even from key allies like the United States.

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