

The Transition of Israel's Foreign Strategy in 1948-1977: An Analytical Framework of National Interest

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Abstract: *Since the end of World War II, Israel has shifted its diplomatic strategy among several key partnerships. The initial Soviet-Israeli cooperation (1948-1954) gave way to the Franco-Israeli alliance (1956-1967), which eventually transitioned to the US-Israeli special relationship (1968-1977). This article uses multiple case studies to examine theoretical assumptions and intermediate mechanisms, drawing on existing international relations theories and national foreign policy decision-making processes. At the core of diplomatic strategy selection is national interest, and Israel's approach has oscillated between survival interests and political interests from 1948 to 1977. When Israel's survival is threatened, political interests and other considerations become secondary in diplomatic strategy. After ensuring survival interests, political interests become the primary focus of Israel's diplomatic strategy.*

Keywords: *Alliance; International Relations; Military Cooperation; Special Relationship; Decision-Making Model*

1. Introduction

Israel is a powerful and developed country in the Middle East with regional influence in military, agriculture, technology, and the economy. Despite its relatively recent founding, Israel has managed to consolidate power through multiple Middle Eastern wars in a hostile geopolitical environment. This paper focuses on the three important wars experienced by Israel in its early days of statehood: the First Arab-Israeli War, the Suez Crisis, and the Six-Day War. It analyzes the three periods of diplomatic strategy to understand the decision-making process behind Israel's diplomatic choices and provides explanations for those choices.

Israel's foreign strategy underwent three stages: the first stage was the period of Soviet-Israeli cooperation (1947-1954), during which Israel received massive military aid and support from the Soviet Union and won the First Arab-Israeli War. This period ended with the signing of an agreement between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. The second stage was the period of the Franco-Israeli alliance (1956-1967), during which Israel rapidly improved its military capabilities with assistance from France. The third stage was the period of the US-Israeli special relationship (1968-1977), during which Israel's cooperation with the United States in military arms gradually consolidated and matured.

The alliance between the Soviet Union and Israel can be explained by the Soviet Union's desire to expel Britain from the Middle East and to expand its influence in the region by supporting the establishment of a Jewish state after World War II (Song Yongcheng, 2013)^[1]. The Soviet Union believed that the benefits of the United States supporting Israel far outweighed those for the Soviet Union. Rather than allowing the United States and Britain to control Palestine, it was better to keep the region in turmoil. As a result, the United States became involved in the Middle East due to its support for Israel. By calling troops from Europe to the Middle East, the United States weakened its defense capabilities in Europe, which reduced the military pressure on the Soviet Union in Europe (Xiao Yu, 2011)^[2].

The alliance between France and Israel is primarily based on common interests. France's failure in the Algerian region and opposition to Egypt align with Israel's stance. As a result, stable military cooperation and an alliance relationship had been established between the two countries before and after the Suez Canal Crisis (Wang Zhongdi, 2007)^[3].

The special relationship between the United States and Israel is rooted in their cultural and religious identity. While the two countries cooperate, they rely on democratic values and a sense of cultural and religious identity to maintain their relationship (Sun Degang, 2003)^[4]. Cultural identity, strategic interests,

and accidental factors are the driving forces behind the formation of U.S.-Israel diplomatic relations, from the three levels of institutional architecture, domestic politics, and decision-makers (Li Yunpeng, 2016)^[5].

The explanation of foreign policy strategy mainly focuses on great powers, such as the Soviet Union, France, and the United States, choosing to establish alliances or special relationships with Israel one after another. However, this often ignores the strategic decision-making of Israel, resulting in a one-sided explanation. This paper examines three cases, from the cooperation between the Soviet Union and Israel to the alliance period between France and Israel, and finally to the formation of the U.S.-Israel special relationship. The paper analyzes national interests by changes in the internal and external environments, and thus forms an analytical framework centered on national interests.

2. Analytical Framework of National Interest

The concept of national interest was initially referred to as "reasons of state." Niccolò Machiavelli believed that the national interest is the ultimate source of legitimacy for government actions, both morally and legally (Yigzaw, 2017)^[6]. Charles Beard argued that the emergence of national interest reflected new political and diplomatic changes at the time. In reality, national interest refers to the subjective and objective needs of a country in its process of survival and development. This article divides national interest into three categories: survival interests, political interests, and economic interests.

Survival interests refer to a country's need to survive, including defense, arms, and security systems. In Israel's history, the country's survival interests were threatened by the First Arab-Israeli War in the early post-World War II period, and continued to be threatened by the Arab world for several years after the war. Political interests mainly refer to a country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political culture. For Israel, the territorial disputes in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the issue of the status of Jerusalem, and the legitimacy of Zionism are important political interests. Economic interests include technological development, economic growth, energy, and international trade, which are crucial to Israel's national development.

2.1 National Interest in International Relations Theory

This paper argues that national interest plays an intermediary role in determining Israel's foreign policy strategy. In international relations theory, various schools of thought and multiple theories have different perspectives on the analysis of state foreign action (Burchill, 2005)^[7]. Classical realism emphasizes a state's own strength and the idea that "power defines interests," and a state's own strength is an important factor in judging its different actions in a stateless environment (Pham, 2008)^[8]. Structural realism emphasizes the impact of the power structure of the international system on state action, and military power is the core of its power.

Neo-classical realism attaches importance to the pressure of the international system and domestic factors on the judgment of system pressure, and forms the state's foreign action through the cognitive judgment of domestic factors. Neo-liberal institutionalism attaches importance to mutual dependence between states and believes that international institutions in the system affect the diplomatic choices of states, including international organizations, mechanisms, and conventions. Social constructivism, as a system theory, emphasizes conceptual variables in the international system, believing that the set of international cultures formed by the exchange of ideas has a decisive role in a state's choices.

However, it's important to note that despite differences in realism, institutionalism, and constructivism, all of these theories share a common thread: national interests. Classical realism posits that a state seeks power in a world without government, where power defines interests. Even in this stateless world, the state still pursues its core interests, which dictate its choices. Structural realism assumes that the international system is anarchic, and states seek survival in a world without government. This need for survival fits well within the theoretical framework of this article. Neo-classical realism focuses on domestic factors that determine decision-making, where interests depend on internal cognition. In contrast, neo-liberal institutionalism assumes that states are rational and motivated by rationality to make the optimal choice, which is to maximize their interests. This optimal choice can be seen in how states decide to cooperate or engage in conflict in this theory. Finally, social constructivism posits ideas as the system variable and argues that a nation's identity is shaped by ideas. Once identity is established, the nation can then determine its own interests and act accordingly.

2.2 National Interest in Decision-Making Model

In addition to theory, understanding the model for making foreign policy decisions is also an important reference for analyzing national interests (Maoz, 1990)^[9]. The rational decision-making model aims to maximize benefits by using a cost accounting approach to achieve the best results at the lowest cost (Oppenheim, 1987)^[10]. The organizational decision-making model believes that foreign policy decisions are based on standard procedures within the organization, and interests are the core considerations of each department (Pettigrew, 2014)^[11]. The pluralistic decision-making model attributes decision-making to bargaining by behavioral entities such as the public, interest groups, mass movements, and multinational corporations in diplomacy, and this model mainly applies to economic issues (Hansen, 1995)^[12]. The political process model assumes that decision-makers simultaneously consider national security interests, domestic political interests, organizational interests, and personal interests, and different results are produced based on the identity and understanding of decision-makers (Elbanna, 2006)^[13]. The crisis decision-making model is adopted when routine decision-making cannot adapt to complex and urgent tasks, emphasizing the security of national interests (Schulze, 1998)^[14].

From the perspective of mainstream international relations theory, different levels provide explanations for state action, and national interests serve as an intermediary mechanism in all of them. Whether it is the power, institutional, and cultural structure at the system level, the national strength at the unit level, or the leadership concepts and policies at the individual level, they all need to realize the logic of foreign policy through the intermediary mechanism of national interests. At the same time, from the perspective of national decision-making models, the five models correspond to judgments on national survival interests, political interests, and economic interests, respectively. Therefore, whether it is international relations theory or international decision-making processes, national interests play an irreplaceable role as an intermediary mechanism in the formulation of foreign policy or the implementation of foreign actions.

2.3 Hypothesis

Based on this, the paper sets up three hypotheses for national interests in order to verify the role of national interests in the historical transition of Israel's foreign policy strategy. The article is based on the premise that national interests serve as an intermediary mechanism in the process of foreign action judgments of a nation, playing an irreplaceable role.

The three hypotheses are as follows:

H 1: Survival interests have been the primary consideration in Israel's history.

H 2: Once survival interests are secured, political and economic interests will occupy a dominant position in Israel's foreign policy.

H 3: In cases where survival interests cannot be guaranteed, political and economic interests will become secondary factors in decision-making.

3. Case Studies on Israel's Diplomatic Strategy and National Interests

This section examines changes in Israel's diplomatic strategy and national interests across three distinct time periods. Although each case covers a different timeframe, all highlight shifts in Israel's national interests and diplomatic strategies throughout different historical stages. Initially, Israel pursued a balanced diplomatic strategy, striving to maintain a balance between the United States and the Soviet Union to ensure its security interests. However, over time, Israel's national interests shifted from security to political interests. Ultimately, Israel chose to establish a special diplomatic relationship with the United States to preserve the political gains it made in the Middle East conflict. The common thread among these three cases is that they all demonstrate the importance of Israel's diplomatic strategy in relation to its national interests, which evolve over time.

3.1 Soviet-Israeli cooperation (1947-1954)

Since 1947, the Soviet Union's position towards the Israel-Palestine conflict began to shift. Initially, the Soviet Union supported Arab independence movements and called for the withdrawal of Western forces from the region. However, in May of 1947, the Soviet Union changed its stance and supported the Zionist movement in establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Although this was inconsistent with the

Soviet Union's mainstream ideology, this alliance persisted through the First Arab-Israeli War until the Czech-Egyptian arms deal in 1955, after which the Soviet Union changed its attitude towards Israel.

During this period, Israel adopted a diplomatic strategy of balancing between the United States and the Soviet Union, with the core being the "diplomatic balance strategy of establishing friendship and cooperation with the United States and the Soviet Union". However, early independent Israel faced tremendous pressure under the power structure of the international system. The Arab world took a hostile attitude towards Israel, and Israel faced huge security pressures in the early days of its establishment. On the American side, fearing that openly supporting Israel would cause Arab countries to collectively turn to the Soviet Union, the United States adopted a policy of balancing in the Arab-Israeli conflict, strictly observing the Middle East arms embargo during the war, and refusing Israel's military demands. On the Soviet side, during the First Arab-Israeli War, the Soviet Union met Israel's large military demands and let Czechoslovakia become an intermediate station to transport weapons (Ro'i, 2018)^[15].

From a national interest perspective, Israel's core interest during this period was its security. The first Arab-Israeli War, which occurred in the early days of the state's founding, could have led to the country's destruction if it failed. Therefore, during this period, Israel's diplomacy was in a temporary passive state, with its core interest being survival, a crucial interest that was urgently needed. Thus, even though the Soviet Union and Israel were in different positions in terms of ideology and the Eastern and Western blocs, due to the need for national security interests, the Soviet Union and Israel formed a temporary close diplomatic relationship in the early post-war period.

With the end of the first Arab-Israeli War, Israel's security interests were guaranteed. As the pattern of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union gradually unfolded, Israel realized that the strategy of balanced diplomacy between the United States and the Soviet Union would be difficult to maintain. At the same time, the Soviet Union gradually began to show goodwill to Arab world countries. In order to gain greater political benefits in the Cold War pattern, Israel chose a foreign policy strategy that was closer to the United States. The core of Israel's foreign policy shift was to pursue stable political interests, namely, to choose a fixed camp in the bipolar pattern to consolidate its country's sovereignty, territory, ideology, and other political interests. Therefore, in the Korean War, Israel made the decision to stand with the Western world led by the United States.

This case study confirms H1 and H2. In the early days of the state's founding, Israel adopted a strategy of balanced diplomacy between the United States and the Soviet Union, with its core consideration being security interests. After the end of the first Arab-Israeli War, Israel adopted a pro-American foreign policy, with its core consideration being political interests, with security interests being consolidated. In the early days, Israel did not choose between the United States and the Soviet Union, which confirms H3, that political interests were not its core consideration when security interests were not guaranteed.

3.2 Franco-Israeli alliance (1956-1967)

The tacit alliance between France and Israel is a unique arrangement that began in 1956. While their interests were initially aligned, they eventually diverged. The French-Israeli alliance is primarily a military agreement in which France guarantees Israel's security in exchange for political interests. Military cooperation is at the heart of the relationship, with France providing modern equipment, tanks, and jet planes to the Israeli defense Forces, eventually leading to nuclear support. During this period, France and Israel closely collaborated on defense agencies, intelligence networks, space, nuclear science, and missile technology. However, as France gained independent nuclear capability, it needed broader resources through European cooperation, and the value of its technical cooperation with Israel diminished. By 1967, their military and technical cooperation had ceased completely.

Israel adopted a diplomatic strategy of close cooperation with France in response to the threat of Arab countries. The confrontation between Arab and Israeli conflicts intensified during the mid-1950s, and Israel was trapped in the Suez Canal crisis. The United States imposed an arms embargo on Israel during this period, and Israel urgently needed the support of a major power. France was facing difficulties in the international arena, with its colonial interests in North Africa threatened by Arab nationalism, and hence, both France and Israel formed a common enemy in Arab countries politically (Styan, 1999)^[16].

3.3 US-Israeli special relationship (1968-1977)

With the victory of the Third Middle East War, Israel's national security situation improved, and it achieved a relative military advantage in confronting the Arab world. However, due to the departure of

its French alliance, Israel fell into the dilemma of lacking a major power in diplomatic strategy again. Therefore, Israel reconsidered improving its relationship with the United States, hoping to rely on the US to fill the void left by France's departure in Israel's military armament reserve support. With Nixon's inauguration in 1969, his strong pro-Israel stance rapidly pushed forward US-Israel relations during his term, gradually forming the special relationship between the two sides. Due to Israel's diplomatic isolation and Arab hostility after the Six-Day War, the US decided to maintain its military advantage in the Middle East by exporting weapons to Israel, thereby countering the Soviet Union and Arab countries. With the defeat of the Fourth Middle East War in 1973, Israel further deepened this special relationship with the US (Markey, 2007)^[17].

4. Conclusion

This paper examines how national interests have shaped Israel's foreign policy across three historical periods. Different international relations theories and decision-making models share a common thread: national interests. Our analytical framework categorizes national interests into three groups: survival, political, and economic interests.

This framework is used to evaluate Israel's diplomatic strategy, and it is shown that national interests have played a central role in these diplomatic relationships. As shown in Table 1, survival interests were the primary consideration in Israel's history, and once survival interests were secured, political and economic interests occupied a dominant position in Israel's foreign policy. In cases where survival interests cannot be guaranteed, political and economic interests become secondary factors in decision-making.

Table 1: Foreign Strategies in Response to National Interest Conditions

Case	Conditions of National Interest	Choice of Foreign Strategy
Soviet-Israeli cooperation (1947-1954)	Urgent action is required to address survival interests. Political decisions must be made with the goal of meeting these survival interests.	From a balance between the US and Soviet Union to unilaterally following the US strategy.
Franco-Israeli alliance (1956-1967)	Survival interests and political interests should be pursued simultaneously, but survival interests take priority.	From unilaterally following the US strategy to forming a military alliance with France.
US-Israeli special relationship (1968-1977)	To ensure survival interests, military guarantees and continuous expansion of political interests are necessary.	Forming a truly special relationship with the US in military affairs.

5. Summary

In summary, this paper emphasizes the importance of national interests in foreign policy decisions. Our framework can be useful for analyzing foreign policy decisions of other countries and illuminating the interplay between national interests and international relations.

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