

## Counter-Terrorism as Strategic Narrative: A Comparative Case Study of the US and Israeli Counter-Insurgency Campaigns in the Middle East

Dr. Sergio Catignani  
University of Leiden  
[sergiocatignani@gmail.com](mailto:sergiocatignani@gmail.com)

Within counter-insurgencies the narrative of a conflict has become an important aspect for legitimizing and creating a consensus on the use of force. As Lawrence Freedman has argued, narratives are “strategic because they do not arise spontaneously, but are deliberately constructed or reinforced out of the ideas and thoughts that are already current”.<sup>1</sup>

Both the US and Israel have traditionally focused on conventional military threats and whilst terrorism has proved a significant security threat to both states, neither state has customarily defined terrorism as an “existential threat”. During the Begin era, Israel began to define terror as an “existential threat”. The perception of terrorism as an existential threat “implied a lowering of Israel’s threshold of provocation which raises the likelihood of belligerent conflict”.<sup>2</sup> This perception re-emerged in Israel during the *Al-Aqsa Intifada* and, more importantly, entered the US’ strategic discourse since 9/11.

The likelihood of bringing the US’ and Israel’s full military power to bear in order to quell insurgencies and associated terrorist actions has, thus, increased exponentially since the end of the Cold War. This increase can be partly explained by the way both states have decided to frame the threat of terrorism in existential terms.

The following paper, thus, will analyze the evolution of both states’ conceptions of terror as an existential threat and the way such a conception has influenced their foreign and security policy decisions vis-à-vis the Middle East, decisions that have often lead to greater instability and conflict rather than their resolution. Discourse analysis of security statements and strategic policy documents regarding the threat of terrorism and how it should be tackled will be analyzed with the help of *Atlas.ti*, a CAQDAS package. Key strategic decisions and events regarding US and Israeli counter-terrorism policies will be examined through process tracing.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs, Adelphi Paper 379* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Horowitz, “Israel’s War in Lebanon: New patterns of strategic thinking and civilian-military relations”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 6/ 3 (1983), p. 95.