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The impact of text framing on the understanding of political conflict

Abstract: The present paper reports on the initial results of a pilot study for a planned cross-cultural project intended to investigate the impact of text framing on the understanding of political conflict. Following the design of a prior experiment by Peleg & Alimi (2005), the pilot study examines the impact of differently framed texts about the approval of the Road Map by the Knesset on German students' assessments of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The results of the study confirmed our theoretical position, according to which media effects cannot be explained using simple stimulus-response models. They depend instead on the *Ss' a priori* mental models, into which new information is integrated.

In contrast to the Israeli study, however, the experiment failed to demonstrate an impact of text framing on the *Ss'* mental models. Possible reasons might be that the framing was too mild, that the *Ss* in the present study were politically far less interested and informed, or that they were too detached from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

1. Introduction

The potential of the media to influence public opinion was recognized very early in media history, and the history of propaganda is as old as the history of the press. Nonetheless, there is still no agreement on whether or not the media have an impact, and if so, what sort of impact this is.

While early empirical studies assumed that the media were powerful (Lasswell, 1927), later studies adopted the opposite assumption, namely that the media are weak (Klapper, 1960). In the meantime, a consensus has arisen that the mass media and their recipients interactively affect each other in a variety of ways (Früh & Schönbach, 1982). After more than seventy years of media effects research, a trend can be identified toward not attributing media effects to the facts reported in the media, but rather toward assuming that reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1969). In this process, media serve as not only mediators, but also as constructors of social realities (Tuchman, 1978; Cohen & Wolfsfeld, 1993). Reported events serve merely as raw material. Offered in de- and recontextualized forms, they mirror the reporters' constructions of reality. Through cognitive processing on the part of the recipient, these constructions are integrated into the recipient's subjective reality. In order to maintain cognitive balance (Heider, 1946, 1958; Festinger, 1957), parts of the offered reality constructions are accepted, while other parts are devaluated, suppressed and/or rejected. In the case of conflict coverage, this process is affected by a number of interrelated factors.

One factor is *the level of conflict escalation*, which progresses from a self-centered divergence of perspectives via competition to struggle, and climaxes in open warfare. Inter-group conflict strengthens intra-group solidarity. Group members who stand out in opposing the enemy can thereby increase their social status. Group members identify more strongly with their own group and its positions, and the more escalated the conflict, the more likely they are to do this (Deutsch, 1973).

A second factor is *the cognitive framework* which corresponds to these levels of conflict escalation and which interprets conflict by means of increasingly radicalized mental models (Kempf, 2002) that can be described along the dimensions of (a) the conceptualization of the conflict as a win-win, win-lose or lose-lose process, (b) the assessment of the parties' rights and aims, (c) the evaluation of their actions and behavior and (d) the emotional consequences of these interpretations, which ultimately transform outrage at war into outrage at the enemy.

A third factor is *the audience's entanglement in the conflict*, which will be greater the more reprehensible the atrocities appear and the more closely a society feels itself linked to one of the parties in historical, political and cultural terms. The more it is entangled, the more an audience will tend to identify with one of the parties, and the more it will tend to interpret the conflict according to the mental model accepted by the party it favors.

It is particularly in long-term, intractable conflicts that such mental models solidify into *societal beliefs*. Intractable conflicts are demanding, stressful, painful, exhausting and costly, both in human and in material terms. This requires that societal members develop strategies that will enable them to cope successfully. Societal beliefs fulfill an important role in the creation of these psychological strategies. Since they are both part of society's ethos and a crucial factor for enduring the burdens of war, they will tend to persist even after the war is over (Bar-Tal, 1998).

One of the many hypotheses that can be derived from these assumptions is that the recipients' mental models will be more flexible, and the interpretive frames offered by news reporting will have more impact on them, the less the recipients are involved in the respective conflict and the greater their distance is from the conflict arena.

Testing this hypothesis is one of the goals of a planned cross-cultural project intended to investigate the impact of text framing on the understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by Israelis and Germans.

The present paper reports on the first results of a pilot study for this project which replicates an experiment that Peleg & Alimi (2005) conducted with Israeli Ss. The aim of the study is to investigate the impact of news articles about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on German readers' assessments of the conflict.

2. Method

2.1 Experimental design

In order to accomplish our aim, we performed an experiment with three experimental groups, who read differently framed versions of a basically neutral text about the approval of the Road Map by the Israeli Knesset. Adopting the experimental design used by Peleg & Alimi (2005), the experiment was divided into three phases:

1. Pre-test
2. Reading the text
3. Post-test

The pre-test consisted of two questionnaires:

- 1.1 A general questionnaire asking the Ss' age, gender, citizenship and religion, their political orientation towards foreign policy (left vs. right) and their personal views in general (liberal vs. conservative), their knowledge about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the relevance they think the conflict should have for German foreign policy, etc. (cf. Appendix 1).
- 1.2 An attitude scale asking for the Ss' assessments of issues like whether the right of return was the crucial problem of the conflict, whether a comprehensive solution was to preferred to an interim solution, whether the vision of "Eretz Israel" was still relevant, etc. (cf. Appendix 2).

The text material consisted of three different versions of the same news article (cf. Appendix 3).

- 2.1 A non-framed (neutral) report about the Knesset's approval of the Road Map.
- 2.2 A (pro-state) version of the same text, which was framed by subheadings that underlined the contents of the following paragraphs, which argued in favor of creating a Palestinian state.
- 2.3 An (anti-state) version of the same text, which was framed by subheadings that underlined contents of the following paragraphs, which argued against creating a Palestinian state.

The post-test consisted of four instruments.

- 3.1 A memory test, which asked the Ss to repeat as literally as possible what they remembered from the text they had read (cf. Appendix 4)
- 3.2 A categorization test, asking the subjects to group into meaningful categories a number of issues like the Road Map, Ariel Sharon, improvement of the Israeli economy, the progress of the political process, etc. that had been mentioned in the text (cf. Appendix 5).
- 3.3 A text assessment questionnaire, asking the Ss to indicate whether the reported events were already known to them, whether the events were reported correctly, whether the text included impartial information about all parties involved, etc. (cf. Appendix 6).
- 3.4 An attitude scale, asking for the Ss' assessment of issues like whether stopping the founding of new settlements would increase the chances for further negotiations, whether the American engagement was helpful in finding a solution to the conflict, whether the vision of peace was realistic, etc. (cf. Appendix 7).

The text material and most of the pre- and post-test instruments were the same as in the Israeli study, but were translated into German. Only the general pre-test questionnaire was adapted to the German situation, and the post-test text-assessment questionnaire, which dates back to a study by Bläsi, Jaeger, Kempf & Spohrs (2005), was not included in the original study by Peleg & Alimi.

Out of the vast data material collected, the present paper focuses on only two issues, which were included both in the pre-test and in the post-test attitude scales and thus allow a direct measurement of the impact which the experimental procedure had on their assessment. These issues were:

1. Whether the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was religious in essence, and
2. Whether Palestinian territorial continuity was a threat to Israel

The exact wording of the respective statements in the two questionnaires is shown in Table 1.

	Pre-test	Post-test
Religious conflict	The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is religious in essence	In essence, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is about religious issues
No threat to Israel	Palestinian territorial continuity is not a threat to Israel	A continuous Palestinian territory is no essential threat to Israel

Table 1: Wording of the analyzed items

Each of these statements was to be evaluated on a 5-point scale with the categories "agree," "rather agree," "undecided," "rather disagree" and "disagree."

Speaking of the impact which the *experimental procedure* had on the assessment of these issues emphasizes a theoretical position which is generally shared in communication studies nowadays and according to which the impact of news coverage (or texts in general) cannot be described by simple stimulus-response models. The impact is the result of an interpretive

process in which the recipient integrates the information into his/her mental model of the respective topic. In this process, the recipient recontextualizes the information, emphasizing or exaggerating part of it and discounting or rejecting other parts, etc. Even though the framing of the information may have an effect on which of the recipient's mental models are primed, this does not mean that they are simply determined by the framing. The offered frames, as well, may be either accepted or rejected, etc.

At the same time, speaking of the impact of the experimental procedure also refers to the complexity of our experimental design, in which the Ss were not simply asked to read a text and then answer questions, but rather in which the Ss had to think in various ways about the information found in the texts and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Already during the pre-test they had to deal with questions about their political and personal views, about their position towards Israel and about their understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. After reading the texts, they had to recollect and to recontextualize the information given, they had to evaluate the quality of the information, and again they had to reveal some indications of their understanding of the conflict. All these are activities that stimulate the integration of the information into the Ss' mental models of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and may have an impact on how and to what extent they do so.

Consequently, it is not just the impact of the texts and their framing which we are measuring, but also the impact of a complex process of coming to terms with how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might be understood.

2.2 Sample characteristics

The experiments were conducted from February 15 until December 6, 2005. The Ss of the study were 227 students from the University of Konstanz, who were randomly assigned to the three experimental conditions.

- The ages of the students ranged between 18 and 47 years ($s(X) = 23.03$; $s(X) = 4.95$)
- Their number of semesters ranged between 1 and 14 ($m(X) = 3.11$; $s(X) = 2.97$).
- 70.5% were female; 29.1% male; 0.4% did not specify.
- 89.4% were German citizens; 8.8% other nationality, 1.8% did not specify.
- 40.5% were Catholic; 30.4% Protestant; 4.0% other; 22.5% no religion; 1.8% did not specify.
- 79.3% were psychology students; 19.8% other; 0.9% did not specify.

The majority of the Ss described their personal views as in general rather liberal (cf. Figure 1) and their political orientation with respect to foreign policy as falling in the spectrum between left and center, 13.7% felt indifferent to it (cf. Figure 2).

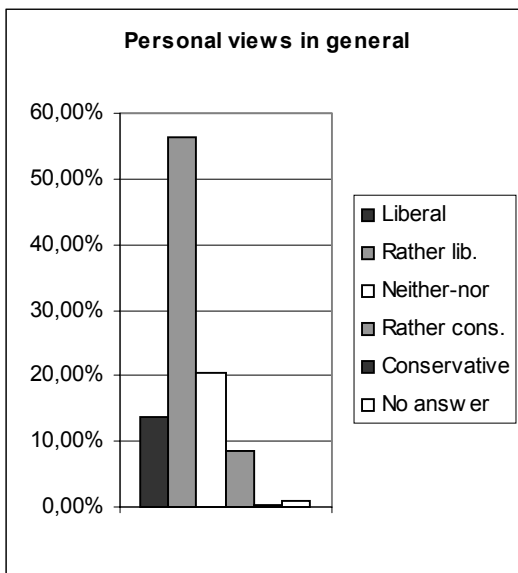


Figure 1: Personal views

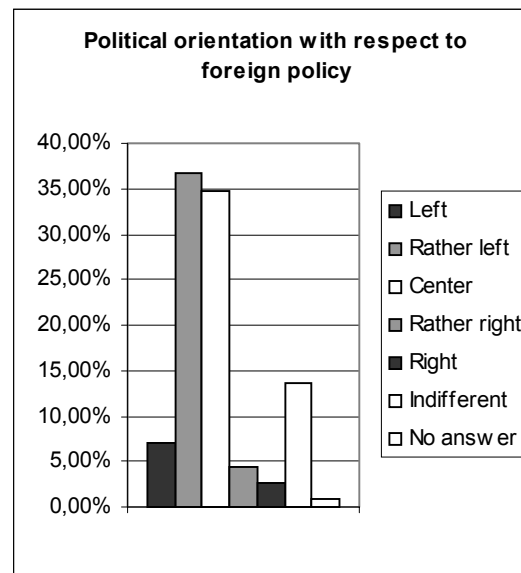


Figure 2: Political Orientation

95.6% had never been to Israel or Palestine before, and the majority of the Ss described their knowledge about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as medium or limited (cf. Figure 3).

Not surprisingly, several of the students had never heard of "Eretz Israel" before and didn't understand the term. Due to the German memory of the Holocaust and the negative connotations of the term "Greater Germany" as a synonym for the Third Reich, as well as due to the negative connotations of "Greater Serbia," which played a certain role as an anti-Serbian propaganda slogan in German public discourse during the post-Yugoslavian civil wars, the terms "Eretz Israel" or "Greater Israel" tend to be avoided in German discourse, albeit in small neo-Nazi circles.

But seemingly, the students' political knowledge was rather poor in general, as several of them claimed that they didn't understand the term "interim solution" either. Nonetheless, the majority of the students stated that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should have medium or high relevance for German foreign policy (cf. Figure 4).

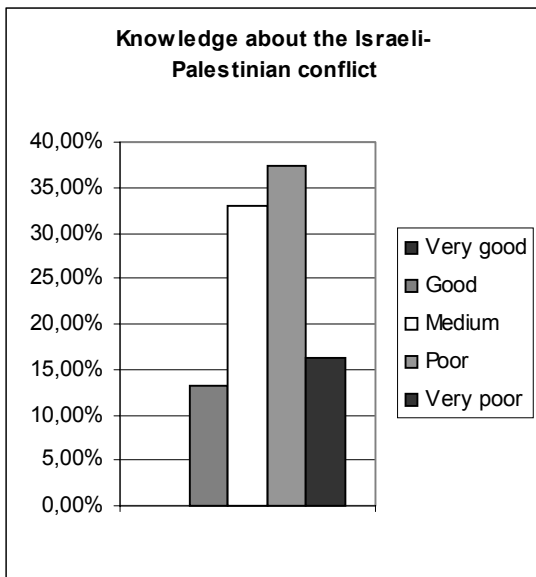


Figure 3: Knowledge about the conflict

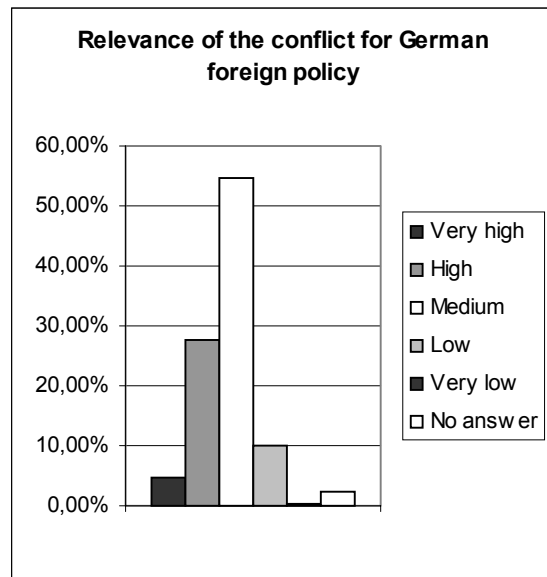


Figure 4: Relevance for German foreign policy

During the experiment, the Ss were randomly assigned to the experimental groups, and the comparison of the Ss pre-test responses to the variables "Religious conflict" and "No threat to Israel" confirmed that there were no significant *a priori* differences between the experimental groups with respect to the Ss' assessments of these issues (cf. Table 2).

Pre-test responses					
Text framing	n	Religious conflict		No threat to Israel	
		m(X)	s(X)	m(X)	s(X)
Neutral	77	1.73	1.108	1.81	0.932
Pro-state	75	1.60	1.053	1.80	0.944
Anti-state	75	1.56	1.017	1.75	1.001
Total	227	1.63	1.058	1.78	0.956
ANOVA		F	0.518		0.086
		df	2		2
		p	0.597		0.918

0 = agree, 1 = rather agree, 2 = undecided or no answer, 3 = rather disagree, 4 = disagree

Table 2: A priori differences between the experimental groups

2.3 Statistical data analysis

In order to investigate the impact that the experimental procedure had on the Ss' assessments of the two issues, both classical statistical methods (t-Test and Analysis of Variance) and Latent Class Analysis were applied to the Ss' responses to the respective items of the pre- and the post-test questionnaire.

While the classical methods focused on the mean differences between the pre- and post-test scores, separately for the two "religious conflict" and the "no threat" items, Latent Class Analysis was used to identify typical response patterns with respect to all four items. Using contingency analysis, the identified classes of response patterns were subsequently related to the framing of the texts and to variations among subject factors like their political orientation, their personal views, their knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the relevance that they think the conflict should have for German foreign policy.

3. Results

3.1 Over-all impact of the experimental procedure

In order to form an initial picture of the impact which the experimental procedure had on the Ss' assessments of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the pre- and post-test scores on the two items were compared separately (cf. Table 3).

	N	Religious conflict		No threat to Israel	
		m(X)	s(X)	m(X)	s(X)
Pre-test	227	1.63	1.058	1.78	0.956
Post-test	227	1.81	1.124	1.56	0.964
t-Test	t	-3.599		4.101	
	df	226		226	
	p	< 0.001		< 0.001	

0 = agree, 1 = rather agree, 2 = undecided or no answer, 3 = rather disagree, 4 = disagree

Table 3: Mean differences between pre- and post-test scores

The results show, that:

- the Ss' agreement with interpreting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as essentially religious significantly declined, and
- the Ss' agreement with the "No threat" statement significantly increased

after the Ss had read the text about the Knesset's approval of the Road Map and had integrated the information into their mental models of the conflict.

Since it cannot be assumed that the experimental procedure affected all Ss in the same linear way, however, Latent Class Analysis was used in order to analyze the Ss' response patterns in a more detailed way. According to the AIC criterion, this analysis resulted in the identification of five latent classes of Ss, which are characterized by different response patterns.

h	ln(L)	n(P)	AIC
1	-1324.09	20	2688.18
2	-1240.98	41	2563.97
3	-1193.03	62	2510.07
4	-1167.94	83	2501.87
5	-1139.17	104	2486.33
6	-1121.16	125	2492.32

Table 4: Goodness of Fit Statistics for the Latent Class Models (h = Number of Classes)

The results of Latent Class Analysis show clearly that the effect of reading the texts and integrating them into the Ss' mental models of the conflict is *not* a *linear* one, but depends rather on the characteristics of the *a priori* mental models into which Ss integrate information.

Ss belonging to Class 3 (cf. Figure 5) have neither an *a priori* standpoint on whether the Palestinian Israeli conflict is religious in essence (42.6% undecided, 11.9% no answer), nor do they have an *a priori* standpoint on whether Palestinian territorial continuity (66.6% undecided, 16.8% no answer) poses a threat to Israel.

After reading the texts, these Ss becomes even more uncertain about the religious essence of the conflict (65.6% undecided, 5.8% no answer), their *a priori* assumption that the essence of the conflict might be religious (43.3% rather agree) becomes weaker (minus 18.4%), and their *a priori* ambiguity about the threat (7.3% rather agree, 8.4% rather disagree with the "no threat" statement) becomes a bit stronger (11.9% rather agree, 13.2% rather disagree).

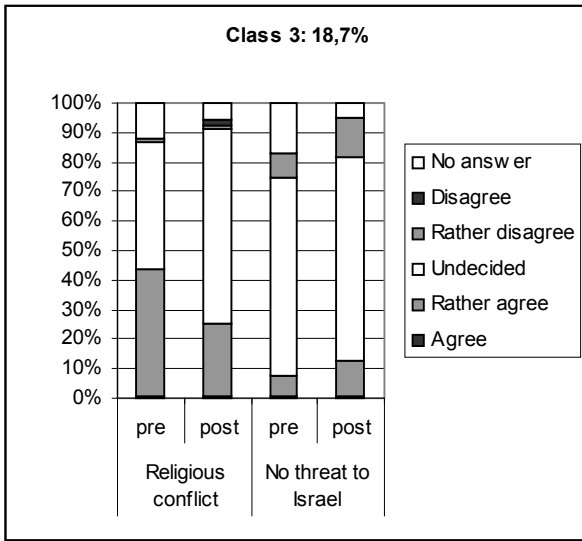


Figure 5: Typical response pattern of Class 3

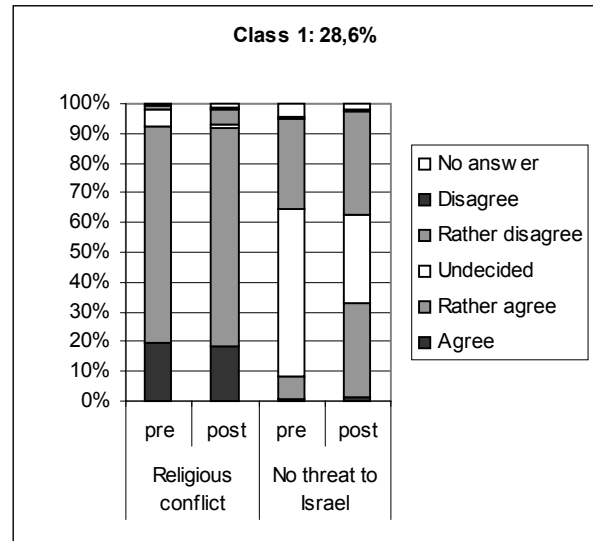


Figure 6: Typical response pattern of Class 1

While *Ss belonging to Class 1* (cf. Figure 6) agree with the religious character of the conflict to a great extent already during the pre-test (19.8% agree, 72.9% rather agree; post-test:), they are mainly uncertain about the “no threat” statement (56.3% undecided), however, against which they also articulate some *a priori* reservations (30.4% rather disagree).

After reading the texts, these *Ss* stick to their religious interpretation of the conflict (18.2% agree, 73.7% rather agree), but they shift from uncertainty (minus 26.6%) to a reasonable amount of support for the “no threat” statement (31.3% rather agree) and thus become rather ambiguous about the issue (35.1% rather disagree).

Ss belonging to Class 4 (cf. Figure 7) support the view of the conflict as a religious one *a priori* even more strongly than *Ss* in Class 1 (38.7% agree, 59.2% rather agree), but they do not regard Palestinian territorial continuity as a threat to Israel (19.7% agree, 66.0% rather agree with the “no threat” statement).

After reading the texts, however, these *Ss* lose some of their certainty about the religious essence of the conflict (23.4% agree, 65.6% rather agree, 8.5% undecided), and they become more certain in denying a threat (33.1% agree, 58.4% rather agree).

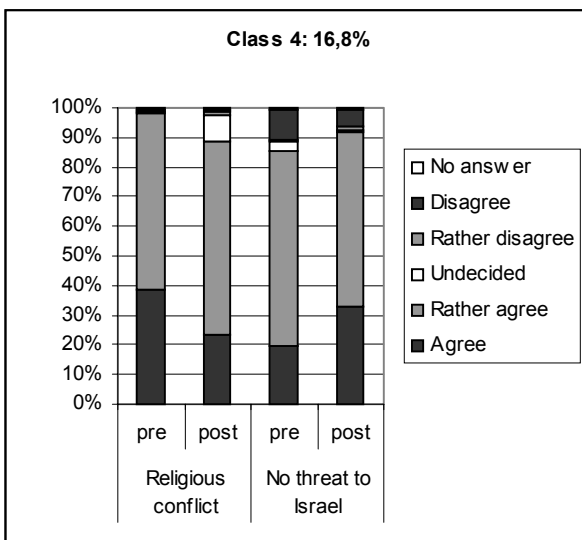


Figure 7: Typical response pattern of Class 4

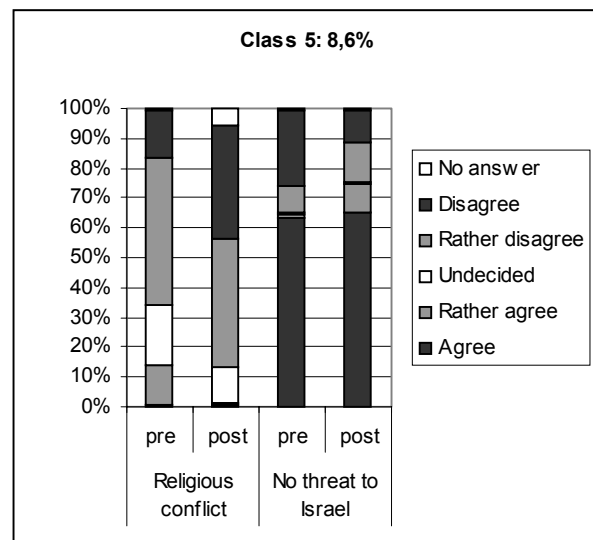


Figure 8: Typical response pattern of Class 5

Ss belonging to Class 5 (cf. Figure 8), on the other hand, are *a priori* a bit undecided (20.1%) and somewhat ambiguous (13.4% rather agree) about the issue, but mainly reject the view of the conflict as a religious one (15.9% disagree, 49.7% rather disagree), while they are most ambiguous about the threat (25.4% disagree, 9.1% rather disagree with the “no threat” statement), though – at the same time – they show the clearest tendency towards the denial of a threat (63.2% agree, 1.1% rather agree).

After reading the texts, these *Ss* reduce their ambiguity on both issues. They become less undecided about the religious essence of the conflict (minus 7.6%) and strengthen both their opposition to interpreting the conflict on a religious basis (38% disagree, 42.8% rather disagree) and their support for the “no threat” statement (65% agree, 9.9% rather agree).

Ss belonging to Class 2 (cf. Figure 9), finally, give rather moderate responses with a clear *a priori* tendency to reject the religious essence of the conflict (2% disagree, 78.2% rather disagree / only 5.5% rather agree) and – though with some ambiguity (18.6% rather disagree) – to support the “no threat” statement (48.1% rather agree).

After reading the texts, these *Ss* reduce their ambiguity on both issues and become more certain about both rejecting the religious essence of the conflict (13.0% disagree, 69.1% rather disagree) and supporting the “no threat” statement (3.4% agree, 61.2% rather agree / only 3.8% rather disagree).

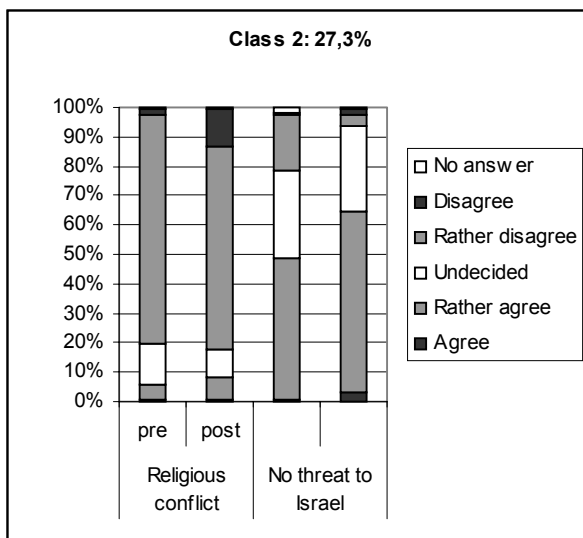


Figure 9: Typical response pattern of Class 2

Summarizing these results, we observe that

- not all classes of *Ss* shift towards more support for the “no threat” statement after having thought about a text on the Knesset’s approval of the Road Map.
- Class 3, which was *a priori* both undecided and ambiguous about this issue, does not shift towards more support, but rather becomes more ambiguous about it.

3.2 Framing effects

In contrast to the Israeli pilot study (Peleg & Alimi, 2005), which demonstrated a clear effect of the framing of texts on the *Ss*’ attitudes towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such an effect could not be found among German students.

There is no significant difference between the experimental groups with respect to the differences between pre- and post-test responses to the two items (cf. Table 5).

Differences between pre- and post-test responses					
Text framing	n	Religious conflict		No threat to Israel	
		m(X)	s(X)	m(X)	s(X)
Neutral	77	-0.18	0.790	0.36	0.826
Pro-state	75	-0.15	0.672	0.15	0.849
Anti-state	75	-0.20	0.753	0.17	0.844
Total	227	-0.18	0.738	0.23	0.842
ANOVA		F	0.101		1.515
		df	2		2
		p	0.904		0.222

0 = agree, 1 = rather agree, 2 = undecided or no answer, 3 = rather disagree, 4 = disagree

Table 5: Differences between the experimental groups

Relating the latent classes to the experimental groups using contingency analysis did not demonstrate a significant correlation between the Ss' class membership and the experimental groups to which the Ss belonged (cf. Figure 10).

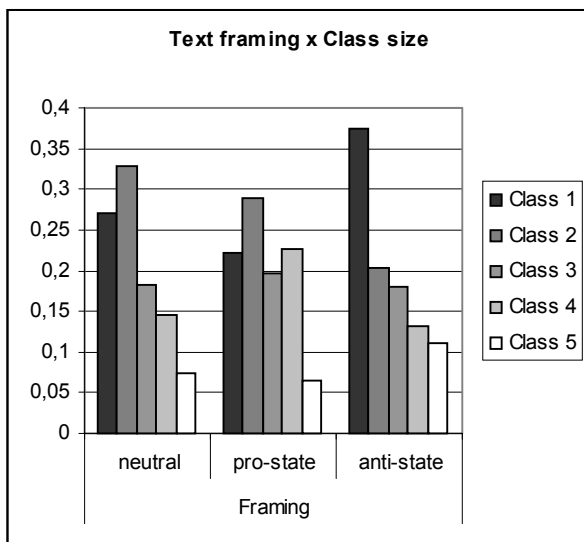


Figure 10: Class sizes within the experimental groups

- Class 1, which shifts from uncertainty to a reasonable amount of support for the "no-threat" statement, seems to be slightly over-represented among the Ss who had read the texts with the anti-state frame, while
- Class 2, which becomes more certain about both rejecting the religious essence of the conflict and support for the "no threat" statement, seems to be slightly under-represented among these Ss.
- Class 4, which loses some of its certainty about the religious essence of the conflict and becomes more certain in denying the threat, seems to be slightly over-represented among the Ss who read the texts with the pro-state frame.

But none of these tendencies is statistically significant (Chi-Square = 8,98; df = 8).

3.3 Effects of inter-subject factors

Moreover, membership in the various classes is also independent of the Ss' estimation

- of their political orientation with respect to foreign policy¹ (Chi-Square = 22.82, df = 24, n.s.),
- of their personal views² (Chi-Square = 7.55, df = 20, n.s.), and

1. Grouped into "left or rather left," "in-between," "right or rather right" and "indifferent or no answer."
 2. Grouped into "liberal," "rather liberal," "neither liberal nor conservative" and "rather conservative, conservative or no answer."

- of the relevance which they think the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should have for German foreign policy¹ (Chi-Square = 22.71, df = 20, n.s.).

The only inter-subject factor which correlated with the Ss' class membership was their (self-estimated) knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Chi-Square = 22.94, df = 12, $p < 0.05$) (cf. Figure 11).

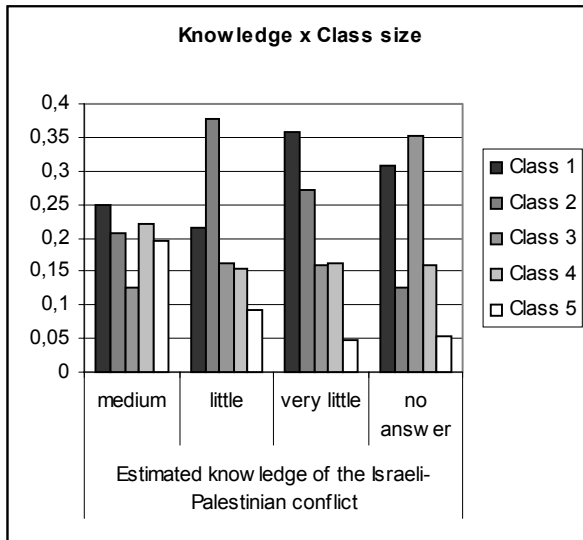


Figure 11: Class sizes within knowledge groups

Class 4 and Class 5, whose members already supported the "no threat" statement *a priori*, though they had opposing *a priori* positions with respect to the religious essence of the conflict, and which both shifted towards seeing the conflict as less religious and Palestinian territorial continuity as less threatening than before, are over-represented among those Ss who estimated their knowledge about the conflict as medium.

Class 2, whose members gave rather moderate responses and who *a posteriori* reduced their ambiguity on both issues, shifting towards clearer rejection of the religious essence of the conflict and stronger support for the "no threat" statement, is over-represented among those Ss who estimated their knowledge as limited.

Class 1, whose members agreed with the religious character of the conflict (both in the pre- and in the post-test) and who shifted from uncertainty and reservations against the "no threat" statement toward ambiguity, is over-represented among those Ss who estimated their knowledge of the conflict as very limited, as well as among those who didn't answer the question at all.

Class 3, finally, whose members were *a priori* undecided on both issues and who became even more undecided and ambiguous about them *a posteriori*, is over-represented among those Ss who didn't answer the question on their knowledge about the conflict.

4. Conclusions

The results of the study have far-reaching theoretical and methodological implications for further studies.

Mental models: The data confirm the theoretical position, according to which the impact of news coverage cannot be described using simple stimulus-response models. Mental models are complex networks of elements that are balanced somewhat like iron filings in a magnetic field. In order to maintain this balance, changing the position of one of the elements affects the others' position as well.

In the present experiment, this is clearly demonstrated by the different classes of pre-post response patterns and particularly by the effect the experimental procedure had on the assessment of the religious dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

1. Grouped into "very high or high," "medium" and "low, very low or no answer."

The texts did not deal with this dimension, but rather with the Knesset's approval of the Road Map, which can be regarded as an important Israeli step towards the foundation of a Palestinian state. In this context, it was mentioned that the ministers of the National Religious Party had voted against the Road Map. Taken by itself, we could expect that this opposition would have reinforced the view that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is essentially a religious conflict. But the opposite was true. The report about the Knesset's approval of the Road Map not only reduced the assumption that Palestinian territorial continuity was a threat to Israel, it also reduced the assumption that the conflict was essentially religious. Interpreted in the framework of peace-process and pro-state mental models, the religious dimension of the conflict appeared less striking to the Ss, although the text contained some information that might have reinforced it. If the conflict is *not* religious in essence, the barriers against the peace process seem less insurmountable.

Impact of text framing: The present study failed to demonstrate an effect of text framing. There may be various reasons for this. One of these reasons might be that the text framing was too mild. The texts themselves were neutral and (nearly) identical. Only the subheadings anticipated some of the information in the following paragraphs. And they did so in the same neutral way.

A clear impact of the frames could be demonstrated in both the Israeli study by Peleg & Alimi (2005) and in a prior study by Annabring, Ditzmann & Kempf (2005; cf. Kempf 2005; Spohrs, 2006) which dealt with the effects of escalation or de-escalation frames on the understanding of post-war conflicts in former Yugoslavia after the fall of Milosevic. In the latter study, the frames were not formulated explicitly, however (no subheadings), but the texts were completely reorganized and reformulated in accordance with the escalation or de-escalation frames. Although the frames remained implicit to the texts, they were much stronger than in the present study.

But if the framing was too mild, how could Peleg & Alimi demonstrate framing effects using the same material that we used in the present study? One possible explanation is that the Ss in our study – mainly psychology students – had too little political knowledge, both in general and about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular.

This explanation would be in accordance with a prior study by Sparr (2004; cf. Kempf, 2005) which failed to demonstrate a framing effect in an experimental design which resembled that of Annabring et al., but recruited its Ss from the readership of an Austrian provincial paper, which was politically much less interested and informed than the readership of nationwide Germany quality papers, from which Annabring et al. had recruited their Ss.¹

Another possibility might be that – in contrast to Peleg & Alimi, who worked with Israeli students – our Ss were too detached from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and their mental models of the conflict were therefore less flexible. This explanation would be in accordance with an observation by Bläsi, Jaeger, Kempf, Kondopoulou & Paskoski (2005), according to which more detached German and Greek journalists modified the mental models with which they interpreted the conflicts in former Yugoslavia after the fall of Milosevic much less than did Serbian journalists.

If this explains why we failed to demonstrate framing effects in the present study, it means that we will have to reconsider our basic theoretical assumptions, as derived from the work of Bar-Tal (1998). Instead of postulating a negative linear relationship between the degree of involvement and the flexibility of the mental models with which a conflict is interpreted, we would have to assume that the relationship was non-linear, with the highest degree of flexibility in the case of medium-range involvement and even less flexibility in the case of detachment than if involvement is high.

This explanation would not be very plausible, however. At least at the peak of a war, one would expect that those who are directly involved and affected would be most rigid, and their mental models the least flexible. But the situation in Israel is different (as it was also different in Serbia after the fall of Milosevic).

Regardless of its drawbacks, Israel has been engaged in a peace process for a dozen years, and it can be assumed that (like many Israelis) the Israeli Ss experienced a sort of inner conflict between competing mental models, interpreting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict either on a win-lose or on a win-win basis. The impact of text framing as observed in the Israeli study could then be explained as the effect of priming different mental models.

The German Ss in our study, on the other hand, did not have such an inner conflict between competing mental models. They just tried to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict one way or another, since there will be no serious consequences for them if their interpretation proves false.

1. It should be noted, however, that this was not the only difference between the two studies. While the study by Annabring et al. was based on original texts from the quality press, Sparr's texts were based on original texts from the provincial press, which is a quite different text genre. Accordingly, Sparr's texts were both much shorter (about half the length of those used by Annabring et al.) and less informative.

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Appendix 1

Pre-test: General questionnaire

Code Nummer _____

Teil A: Allgemeine Informationen

1. Alter _____
2. Geschlecht
 weiblich
 männlich
3. Staatsbürgerschaft
 deutsch
 sonstige, und zwar _____
4. Religionszugehörigkeit
 evangelisch
 katholisch
 sonstige, und zwar _____
 keine
5. Studienfach _____
6. Semesterzahl _____
7. Wie finanzieren Sie zurzeit Ihre Ausbildung?

	Nein, dadurch nicht	Ja, teilweise	Ja, hauptsächlich
Durch Unterstützung der Eltern	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Durch Einkommen des (Ehe-) Partners/der (Ehe)-Partnerin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Durch Bafög	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Durch andere Stipendien (Begabtenförderung, Stiftungen, Firmen)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Durch eigene Arbeit während der Vorlesungszeit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Durch eigene Arbeit während der Semesterferien	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Durch anderes _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Wie viel Geld steht Ihnen zurzeit monatlich für Ihren Lebensunterhalt zur Verfügung?

Teil B: Politisches Interesse

Es folgen verschiedene Fragen, die dazu dienen sollen, den Grad Ihres politischen Engagements und Interesses zu erfassen. Als Beispiel für ein außenpolitisches Thema konzentrieren wir uns weiter unten auf den israelisch-palästinensischen Konflikt.

9. Wie würden Sie Ihre politischen Ansichten bezüglich Außen- und Verteidigungspolitik definieren?

links	eher links	in der Mitte	eher rechts	rechts	irrelevant
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Wie würden Sie insgesamt Ihre persönlichen Überzeugungen beschreiben?

liberal	eher liberal	weder noch	eher konservativ	konservativ
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Ist es Ihrer Meinung nach wichtig, bezüglich sozialer und politischer Themen auf der Höhe der Zeit zu sein?

sehr wichtig	wichtig	einigermaßen wichtig	weniger wichtig	unwichtig
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Welches ist Ihre hauptsächliche Informationsquelle für soziale und politische Themen?

- Printmedien
- Fernsehen
- Radio
- Internet
- Persönliche Kommunikation
- Sonstige, und zwar _____

13. Bitte geben Sie an, wie oft Sie innerhalb der letzten zwölf Monate an den folgenden sozialen oder politischen Aktivitäten teilgenommen haben.

	dreimal oder öfters	ein- oder zweimal	einmal	überhaupt nicht
Demonstration/ Protestaktion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Humanitäre Hilfe (z.B. Spenden)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gemeinnützige Arbeit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14. Haben Sie an der letzten Bundestagswahl teilgenommen?

- Ja
- Nein

15. Sind Sie schon einmal in Israel/Palästina gewesen?

mehrmals	einmal	noch nie
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. Wie würden Sie Ihre Kenntnis des israelisch-palästinensischen Konflikts einschätzen?

sehr gut	gut	mittelmäßig	gering	sehr gering
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

17. Welchen Stellenwert sollte Ihrer Meinung nach der israelisch-palästinensische Konflikt für die deutsche Außenpolitik haben?

sehr hohen	hohen	mittelmäßigen	geringen	sehr geringen
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 2

Pre-test: Attitude questionnaire

18. Im Folgenden finden Sie einige Stellungnahmen in Bezug auf den israelisch-palästinensischen Konflikt. Bitte geben Sie an, wie stark Sie damit übereinstimmen.

	Stimme voll zu	Stimme eher zu	Unentschieden	Stimme eher nicht zu	Stimme über- haupt nicht zu
Das Rückkehrrecht für palästinensische Flüchtlinge ist der Kern des Problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eine endgültige Lösung ist einer Interimslösung vorzuziehen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Es gibt keinen notwendigen Zusammenhang zwischen wirtschaftlichem Wachstum und einer politischen Lösung.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eine Rückkehr zu den Grenzen von 1967 wird eine stabile Lösung ermöglichen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Die Palästinenser sind unfähig, ihre eigenen Angelegenheiten zu regeln.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ein zusammenhängendes palästinensisches Gebiet stellt für Israel keine Bedrohung dar.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Es gibt keine Ähnlichkeiten zwischen dem israelischen Unabhängigkeitskampf 1948 und der Intifada.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eine Konfliktlösung kann nur durch politische Übereinkünfte erzielt werden.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Der palästinensisch-israelische Konflikt ist in seinem Kern ein religiöser Konflikt.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Die Vision von „Eretz Israel“ ist nicht mehr relevant.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 3

The various text versions

1. The non-framed text

Die israelische Regierung ratifiziert die "Road Map" und einigt sich auf die Bildung eines Palästinenserstaates

Nathan Guttman and Arnon Regular

Der israelische Premierminister Ariel Sharon wird mit dem palästinensischen Premierminister Mahmud Abbas zusammentreffen, um die Umsetzung der ersten Phase der Road Map zu besprechen, welche die prinzipielle israelische Akzeptanz eines palästinensischen Staates und den Baustopp aller jüdischer Siedlungen vorsieht.

Die israelische Regierung hat gestern die Road Map mit einer Mehrheit von 12 zu 7 Stimmen ratifiziert. Vier Minister enthielten sich. Gegen die Road Map stimmten die Minister Landau, Katz und Scheransky sowie alle Minister der Nationalreligiösen Partei und der Nationalen Union. Netanyahu, Livnat, Naveh und Hanegbi enthielten sich.

Vor der Abstimmung sagte Sharon: „Ein palästinensischer Staat ist nicht mein Lebenstraum, aber auf lange Sicht ist es nicht richtig, dass Israel dreieinhalb Millionen Palästinenser beherrscht. Als einer, der jeden Berg und Hügel kennt, sind mir die ideologischen Schwierigkeiten bekannt, aber wir müssen nach einer Lösung für die zukünftigen Generationen suchen.“

Zu Beginn der Beratungen, die sechs Stunden dauerten, stellte Sharon weiterhin klar, dass die vierzehn Bedingungen, die Israel der amerikanischen Administration vorgelegt hat, im Rahmen der Umsetzung des Plans unverhandelbar seien. Er fügte hinzu, dass sich mit weiteren politischen Fortschritten auch die ökonomische Situation verbessern würde.

Mahmud Abbas reagierte mit den Worten: „Die Ratifizierung der Road Map ist ein wichtiger und positiver erster Schritt, aber der wirkliche Test wird die Umsetzung des gesamten Plans sein. Die israelischen Bedingungen sind nicht Teil des Plans und deshalb für seine Umsetzung irrelevant. Außerdem sind sie für die Palästinenser inakzeptabel.“

Die amerikanische Administration begrüßte die israelische Entscheidung. Der Sprecher von Präsident Bush, welcher selbst auf seiner texanischen Ranch im Urlaub weilte, sagte, dies sei ein wichtiger Schritt vorwärts. Der Sprecher fügte hinzu, sie seien „guter Hoffnung, mit allen Parteien in der Region zusammenzuarbeiten, um die Friedensvision zu verwirklichen, die Präsident Bush in seiner Rede am 24. Juni vorgestellt hat.“

2. The pro-state text

Die israelische Regierung ratifiziert die "Road Map" und einigt sich auf die Bildung eines Palästinenserstaates

Nathan Guttman and Arnon Regular

Der israelische Premierminister Ariel Sharon wird mit Mahmud Abbas, dem palästinensischen Premierminister, zusammentreffen, um die Umsetzung der ersten Phase der Road Map zu besprechen, welche die prinzipielle israelische Akzeptanz eines palästinensischen Staates und den Baustopp aller jüdischer Siedlungen vorsieht.

Große Mehrheit in der israelischen Regierung

Die israelische Regierung hat gestern die Road Map mit einer Mehrheit von 12 zu 7 Stimmen ratifiziert. Vier Minister enthielten sich. Gegen die Road Map stimmten die Minister Landau, Katz und Scheransky sowie alle Minister der Nationalreligiösen Partei und der Nationalen Union. Netanyahu, Livnat, Naveh und Hanegbi enthielten sich.

Mahmud Abbas: Die Ratifizierung – ein wichtiger erster Schritt

Der palästinensische Premierminister Mahmud Abbas reagierte mit den Worten: „Die Ratifizierung der Road Map ist ein wichtiger und positiver erster Schritt, aber der wirkliche Test wird die Umsetzung des gesamten Plans sein. Die israelischen Bedingungen sind nicht Teil des Plans und deshalb für seine Umsetzung irrelevant. Außerdem sind sie für die Palästinenser inakzeptabel.“

Sharon: Eine Lösung für zukünftige Generationen

Vor der Abstimmung hatte Sharon gesagt: „Ein palästinensischer Staat ist nicht mein Lebenstraum, aber auf lange Sicht ist es nicht richtig, dass Israel dreieinhalb Millionen Palästinenser beherrscht. Als einer, der jeden Berg und Hügel kennt, sind

mir die ideologischen Schwierigkeiten bekannt, aber wir müssen nach einer Lösung für die zukünftigen Generationen suchen.“ Zu Beginn der Beratungen, die sechs Stunden dauerten, stellte Sharon weiterhin klar, dass die vierzehn Bedingungen, die Israel der amerikanischen Administration vorgelegt hat, im Rahmen der Umsetzung des Plans unverhandelbar seien. Er fügte hinzu, dass sich mit weiteren politischen Fortschritten auch die ökonomische Situation verbessern würde.

Präsident Bush begrüßte die Entscheidung

Die amerikanische Administration begrüßte die israelische Entscheidung. Der Sprecher von Präsident Bush, welcher selbst auf seiner texanischen Ranch im Urlaub weilte, sagte, dies sei ein wichtiger Schritt vorwärts. Der Sprecher fügte hinzu, sie seien „guter Hoffnung, mit allen Parteien in der Region zusammenzuarbeiten, um die Friedensvision zu verwirklichen, die Präsident Bush in seiner Rede am 24. Juni vorgestellt hat.“

3. The anti-state text

Die israelische Regierung ratifiziert die "Road Map" und einigt sich auf die Bildung eines Palästinenserstaates

Nathan Guttman and Arnon Regular

Der israelische Premierminister Ariel Sharon wird mit Mahmud Abbas, dem palästinensischen Premierminister, zusammentreffen, um die Umsetzung der ersten Phase der Road Map zu besprechen, welche die prinzipielle israelische Akzeptanz eines palästinensischen Staates und den Baustopp aller jüdischer Siedlungen vorsieht.

Fast die Hälfte der israelischen Regierung verweigerte ihre Zustimmung

Die israelische Regierung hat gestern die Road Map mit einer Mehrheit von 12 zu 7 Stimmen ratifiziert. Vier Minister enthielten sich. Gegen die Road Map stimmten die Minister Landau, Katz und Scheransky sowie alle Minister der Nationalreligiösen Partei und der Nationalen Union. Netanyahu, Livnat, Naveh und Hanegbi enthielten sich.

Sharon: Nicht mein Lebenstraum

Vor der Abstimmung hatte Sharon gesagt: „Ein palästinensischer Staat ist nicht mein Lebenstraum, aber auf lange Sicht ist es nicht richtig, dass Israel dreieinhalb Millionen Palästinenser beherrscht. Als einer, der jeden Berg und Hügel kennt, sind mir die ideologischen Schwierigkeiten bekannt, aber wir müssen nach einer Lösung für die zukünftigen Generationen suchen.“ Zu Beginn der Beratungen, die sechs Stunden dauerten, stellte Sharon weiterhin klar, dass die vierzehn Bedingungen, die Israel der amerikanischen Administration vorgelegt hat, im Rahmen der Umsetzung des Plans unverhandelbar seien. Er fügte hinzu, dass sich mit weiteren politischen Fortschritten auch die ökonomische Situation verbessern würde.

Mahmud Abbas: Die Bedingungen Israels sind irrelevant

Mahmud Abbas sagte, die Ratifizierung der Road Map sei ein wichtiger und positiver erster Schritt, aber der wirkliche Test werde die Umsetzung des gesamten Plans sein. Er fügte hinzu, dass die israelischen Bedingungen nicht Teil des Plans und deshalb für seine Umsetzung irrelevant seien. Außerdem wären sie für die Palästinenser inakzeptabel.“

Präsident Bush auf Urlaub in Texas

Die amerikanische Administration begrüßte die israelische Entscheidung. Der Sprecher von Präsident Bush, welcher selbst auf seiner texanischen Ranch im Urlaub weilte, sagte, dies sei ein wichtiger Schritt vorwärts. Der Sprecher fügte hinzu, sie seien guter Hoffnung, mit allen Parteien in der Region zusammenzuarbeiten, um die Friedensvision zu verwirklichen, die Präsident Bush in seiner Rede am 24. Juni vorgestellt hat.

Appendix 4

Post-test: Memory test

Bitte versuchen Sie, aus dem gerade gelesenen Text zehn Ausschnitte *so wörtlich wie möglich* zu zitieren. Die zitierten Ausschnitte können aus ganzen Sätzen oder aus Teilsätzen bestehen.

Bitte blättern Sie nicht zurück - Ihre Daten wären sonst wertlos für die Untersuchung.

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Appendix 5

Post-test: Categorization test

Nachfolgend finden Sie 15 Begriffe, die im gerade gelesenen Text genannt wurden.

Bitte versuchen Sie, diese Begriffe in Kategorien zu gruppieren, die ihnen sinnvoll erscheinen.

Die Kategorien müssen sich nicht gegenseitig ausschließen, das heißt, ein Begriff kann in mehrere Kategorien eingruppiert werden.

Die Anzahl der Kategorien bleibt Ihnen überlassen.

Hier dürfen Sie selbstverständlich zwischen dieser und der nächsten Seite hin- und herblättern.

1. Die Road Map
2. Ariel Sharon
3. Verbesserung der israelischen Wirtschaft
4. Fortschritt des politischen Prozesses
5. Die Nationale Union
6. Beherrschung von 3,5 Millionen Palästinensern
7. Unverhandelbare Bedingungen
8. Die Friedensvision
9. Unterstützung der amerikanischen Administration
10. Ratifizierung der Road Map
11. Ein palästinensischer Staat
12. Stopp des Siedlungsbaus
13. Bush's Urlaub
14. Mahmud Abbas
15. Eine Lösung für zukünftige Generationen

Kategorie	Kategorie	Kategorie
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Kategorie	Kategorie	Kategorie
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Appendix 6

Post-test: Text assessment test

Im Folgenden finden Sie einige Fragen zum zuvor gelesenen Zeitungsartikel.
Kreuzen Sie bitte an:

1. Waren Ihnen die geschilderten Ereignisse bereits bekannt?

ja	teilweise	nein
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Kreuzen Sie bitte an, ob Sie den folgenden Aussagen zustimmen oder nicht:

2. „Das geschilderte Ereignis ist korrekt dargestellt“

trifft zu	trifft teilweise zu	weiß nicht	trifft überwiegend nicht zu	trifft nicht zu
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. „Der Text enthielt unparteiische Informationen über alle Beteiligten“

trifft zu	trifft teilweise zu	weiß nicht	trifft überwiegend nicht zu	trifft nicht zu
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. „Im Text wurde eine bestimmte Partei bevorzugt behandelt“

trifft zu	trifft teilweise zu	weiß nicht	trifft überwiegend nicht zu	trifft nicht zu
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Kreuzen Sie bitte an:

5. War der Sachverhalt des Textes verständlich?

ja	teilweise	nein
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Hat der Text für Sie neue Aspekte ins Spiel gebracht?

ja	teilweise	nein
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Können Sie der Akzentsetzung des Textes zustimmen?

ja	teilweise	nein
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Weckt dieser Text Ihr Interesse an weiteren Informationen?

ja	teilweise	nein
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Stellt der Text den Sachverhalt wahrheitsgemäß oder verzerrt dar?

wahrheits- gemäß	teilweise wahrheitsgemäß	weiß nicht	überwiegend verzerrt	verzerrt
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix 7

Post-test: Attitude questionnaire

Zum Abschluss finden Sie noch einmal einige Stellungnahmen bezüglich des israelisch-palästinensischen Konflikts. Bitte geben Sie wieder an, wie stark Sie damit übereinstimmen.

	Stimme voll zu	Stimme eher zu	Unentschieden	Stimme eher nicht zu	Stimme über- haupt nicht zu
Bei einem Stopp des Siedlungsbaus sind weitere Verhandlungen möglich.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Das amerikanische Engagement trägt nicht zur Lösungsfindung bei.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eine politische Lösung und wirtschaftliches Wachstum hängen nicht notwendigerweise zusammen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Die Vision des Friedens ist erreichbar.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unverhandelbare Bedingungen von Seiten der Israelis sind notwendig für jeden weiteren Schritt mit den Palästinensern.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ein zusammenhängendes palästinensisches Territorium ist keine existenzielle Bedrohung für Israel.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eine andere Nation zu beherrschen widerspricht den moralischen Prinzipien Israels.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Die Road Map ist ein notwendiger politischer Kompromiss.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Im Kern geht im israelisch-palästinensischen Konflikt um Religionsfragen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mahmud Abbas ist ein würdiger palästinensischer Präsident.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>