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An Analysis of Egyptian and Israeli Discourse on Israel's Control of the Philadelphi Corridor during the 2023 Gaza War

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the interplay between sovereignty discourse and national security through an analysis of Israeli and Egyptian discourses during Israel's control over the Philadelphi Corridor following the 2023 Gaza War. Employing critical discourse analysis, the research examines official statements and media coverage from both nations, highlighting how sovereignty is mobilised to legitimize military actions and secure strategic advantages. The findings reveal contrasting approaches. Israel framed its actions as essential to national security and counterterrorism, using symbolic language to justify its occupation. On the other hand, Egypt sought to balance sovereignty discourse with regional stability and international obligations. However, both discourses displayed inconsistencies between rhetoric and practice, with significant implications for human security and regional stability. This study contributes to understanding the role of sovereignty discourse in shaping geopolitical conflicts and offers insights into the challenges of aligning security imperatives with legal and ethical norms.

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Introduction

In the Middle East, sovereignty has political significance, and it is shaped by historical conflicts, national identities, and regional alliances. The media has a strong guiding influence in shaping public perceptions and political debates on sovereignty, especially in times of conflict. The 2023 Gaza War, marked by Israel's control of the Philadelphi Corridor, exemplifies a geopolitical event where media coverage profoundly affected public understanding and state narratives regarding sovereignty. This study aims to conduct a political discourse analysis to examine how Egypt and Israel addressed the issue of sovereignty in the context of the Philadelphi Corridor and the political interactions between the two states following Israel's control over the area during its 2023 war on Gaza. It seeks to explore the impact of military conflict on the orientations and positions of each party regarding sovereignty in the region, identifying potential shifts in the political stances reflected in official or media discourses. By comparing the Egyptian and Israeli discourses, the study investigates differences in

their sovereign visions, approaches to defending borders and national interests, and use of sovereignty and international legitimacy in their language.

Additionally, the study delves into the role of sovereignty within regional dynamics, examining how these statements and discourses influence regional and global relations, including international reactions and their potential effects on regional stability. The role of media is also analysed, focusing on how various outlets shape public opinion about Israel's control over the Philadelphi Corridor and contribute to the portrayal of sovereignty in Egyptian and Israeli media narratives. Finally, the study assesses the broader implications of this conflict on the future of peace dynamics, truces between Egypt and Israel, and the region's political trajectory.

The study faced challenges in obtaining comprehensive and accurate data on political and media discourses issued by governments or media institutions in Egypt and Israel. This difficulty stemmed from the sensitivity of the topic and the lack of complete or reliable information at times. Additionally, the analysis was limited to official or media discourse, which did not account for popular responses or protests that could reflect other opinions and dimensions of sovereignty. Local political and economic conditions in Egypt and Israel also influenced the interpretation of discourses, making it challenging to determine the real reasons or motivations behind some political positions.

Furthermore, the study's focus on a limited time period, particularly the period following the 2023 Gaza War, restricted a comprehensive analysis of the conflict's dynamics and sovereignty in other times or geographical contexts. Egypt's relationship with Israel added another layer of complexity due to its multifaceted political and historical factors, complicating efforts to isolate discourse related to the Philadelphi Corridor from the broader context of the Arab-Israeli conflict or issues such as the Palestinian file or Egypt's relations with other regional powers. Challenges in accurately translating speeches from Hebrew or Arabic also posed potential risks to the precision of text or message analyses extracted from these speeches. Additionally, bias in selecting speeches or specific interpretations could influence the analysis results, especially in a sensitive area such as sovereignty and regional conflict. By focusing solely on textual analysis, the study did not account for the real-world impacts of these discourses, such as troop movements or political interventions, nor did it predict how these speeches might shape the long-term trajectory of the conflict amidst the region's evolving international situation.

In relation to the literature on the topic of this study, Samantha Besson's work (Besson, 2004) examines conceptual shifts in sovereignty and its adaptability to political and legal transformations in both national and international contexts. Focusing on cases where multiple sovereign structures, such as the European Union, overlap, Besson reflects on the tension between traditional and cooperative sovereignty. She proposes a framework that views sovereignty as an "essentially contestable concept," highlighting its dynamic nature and potential for reshaping to address the complexities of the modern world order. Besson's study significantly contributes to the academic debate on sovereignty by positioning it as a flexible and evolving construct. However, while her study provides a rich theoretical framework for understanding sovereignty as a dynamic process, its reliance on the European context raises questions about the broader applicability of its findings to other regions.

Building on this discussion, Mustafa Menshaway's (Menshaway 2018) study explores how sovereignty is employed as a discursive and political tool to reshape the state and its borders during the Syrian conflict. Menshaway presents sovereignty as a multidimensional concept that is adaptable to support various narratives in national and international conflicts. By linking theoretical discourse with practical applications of sovereignty, Menshaway's work underscores how political and geographical contexts can redefine the concept to serve specific agendas. It also emphasises the role of sovereign

discourse in enhancing state legitimacy and justifying repressive policies. However, Menshawey's analysis primarily focuses on the Syrian regime and its allies, offering limited insight into counter-narratives from opposition forces or other actors, which may restrict the applicability of the findings to conflicts between two sovereign states.

These studies provide valuable perspectives on the dynamic and context-dependent nature of sovereignty. They illustrate how sovereign discourse can be reshaped to align with political, legal, and geographical imperatives and offer insights into its role in regional and international conflicts. However, this study tries to highlight the importance of sovereignty discourse and how it is used to achieve national security purposes by addressing significant research questions, including how the Israeli and Egyptian sovereign discourse on Israel's control over the Philadelphi Corridor reflects national security issues, and how Egypt balances its relationship with Israel while maintaining its national sovereignty and security. It anticipates providing a deeper understanding of political discourse and its role in building sovereignty and legitimising military presence, analysing the mutual influences between Egypt and Israel, and examining how political discourses affect relations between the two countries. Moreover, it seeks to explore how declarations of sovereignty influence military decisions and security policies. The study critically examines the interplay between Israeli and Egyptian official statements regarding the Philadelphi Corridor by employing political discourse and political analysis methodologies. It contributes to a broader understanding of sovereignty discourse and international relations in this complex regional context.

Conceptual Framework

National sovereignty is the supreme authority of a state to exercise rule over its territory and people without external interference (Krasner, 1999). This authority encompasses political, economic, and military decision-making. In this study, sovereignty is employed to examine how Israel and Egypt invoked this principle during the conflict over the Philadelphi Corridor and to assess the influence of security and geopolitical challenges on the sovereignty of both parties. Originating from the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), traditional sovereignty is characterised by the state's supreme authority within its borders, prohibition of external interference, and territorial integrity, encompassing control over resources and people (Krasner, 1999). However, globalisation has significantly transformed traditional sovereignty, introducing constraints through economic interdependence, international organisations, cultural exchange, and global media (Held & McGrew, 2007; Beck, 2006). Furthermore, the international community's emphasis on human rights and concepts like Responsibility to Protect (R2P) has redefined sovereignty as conditional upon adherence to global norms (Keohane, 2003; Kaldor, 2007).

While sovereignty today represents a balance between national independence and international obligations, states adapt their principles to suit their interests. This reflects a shift from an absolute Westphalian model to one influenced by globalisation and interconnectedness (Krasner, 2001). This evolving nature of sovereignty underpins the ongoing tension between the need for national independence and international cooperation in addressing global challenges. National security, defined as protecting a state from internal and external threats, is another pivotal concept in this study. It involves defending borders, safeguarding national interests, and addressing security risks (Buzan, 1991). This study highlights the intersection of sovereignty and national security in the region by analysing Israel's justifications for controlling the Philadelphi Corridor and Egypt's concerns about its security implications. Border conflicts, such as disagreements over controlling territories adjacent to state borders, provide further context for understanding the Philadelphi Corridor dispute (Prescott, 1987). This conflict reflects broader geopolitical dynamics, influenced by historical agreements such as the Camp David and Oslo Accords, which left Gaza in a precarious geographical and political position. The tunnels beneath the Philadelphi Corridor exemplify the challenges of closed borders and their role in fueling smuggling activities and regional tensions.

Security and social challenges arising from the conflict further illustrate the impact on local populations and regional stability. The Philadelphi Corridor has become a focal point of security vulnerabilities, with tunnels serving as conduits for smuggling weapons and goods, exacerbating tensions between Israel, Egypt, and Hamas. Simultaneously, humanitarian crises in Gaza, stemming from restricted freedom of movement and deteriorating social cohesion, underscore the broader implications of the conflict. Diplomatic and military efforts to manage border disputes have yet to fully address these challenges, emphasising the need for comprehensive strategies that balance security, humanitarian, and political considerations. Public diplomacy, the strategic use of media and public discourse to influence international public opinion, is critical in shaping narratives surrounding the Philadelphi Corridor (Nye, 2004). Israel and Egypt have employed public diplomacy to justify their positions and garner local and international support. This underscores the power of media and discourse in framing conflicts and advancing political objectives on the regional and global stages.

Methodology

The study relies on a descriptive-analytical and critical discourse analysis methodology, integrating political analysis to review official statements from Israeli and Egyptian sides regarding Israel's control over the Philadelphi Corridor. This approach enables examining the relationship between official discourses and national sovereignty while providing insights into the political contexts related to the topic. The descriptive-analytical approach aims to describe and analyse official statements from Israeli and Egyptian officials regarding the Philadelphi Corridor. This involves collecting these statements from the media and official reports, performing detailed text analyses to identify the main messages and their meanings, and comparing Israeli and Egyptian statements to highlight differences and similarities in their discourses. Complementing this, critical discourse analysis (CDA) critically examines political discourses to understand how power and sovereignty are constructed through language. This involves applying CDA tools to analyse relationships between language, power, and sovereignty, studying how language reinforces or undermines sovereignty in statements, and considering the factors influencing the discourse, such as political identity, legitimacy, and security threats.

A temporal contextual analysis methodology addresses changes over time, studying the development of political discourse and statement changes during specific periods, such as May through September 2024. This approach tracks statements issued during these months. It examines their temporal context, analysing changes in political positions in response to variables like military developments in Gaza, political negotiations, and regional or international pressures. The study utilises tools such as text analysis, where official statements are analysed and compared, and qualitative analysis methods, which examine the frequency of different themes and messages within the statements. Data sources include official statements by Israeli and Egyptian officials through media outlets like newspapers and satellite channels, government reports, excerpts from leaked or media-reported conversations and negotiations, and previous research on sovereignty, discourse analysis, and Israeli and Egyptian policy.

Practically, the research involves several steps. First, data is collected, gathering statements and information from diverse sources, including media, government reports, and articles. This is followed by data analysis, where texts are analysed using specific methodological tools. Finally, the findings are compiled into a report that clearly explains Israeli and Egyptian positions and policies based on the analysis. Regarding the theoretical framework, this study employs a theoretical framework that synthesises critical discourse analysis (CDA), constructivist discourse theory, and the concept of sovereignty discourse to investigate Israeli and Egyptian discourses surrounding

control of the Philadelphi Corridor. The framework facilitates an in-depth examination of how language, sovereignty, and political objectives intersect, uncovering the implicit goals and strategies embedded in official statements and policy rhetoric.

Discourse analysis serves as the foundation of this research, offering tools to deconstruct texts and understand how language shapes ideas, behaviours, and power relations in political contexts (Fairclough, 2003). This methodology enables the study of the Egyptian and Israeli sovereignty discourses surrounding the Philadelphi Corridor, revealing how states use language to legitimise power and policy decisions. While critical discourse analysis (CDA) is central to this study, emphasising the relationship between language and power dynamics. By analysing key terms such as “total control” and “cooperation with Egypt,” the research uncovers how Israeli discourse constructs narratives to reinforce political and security dominance. CDA examines how sovereignty is framed as a mechanism for maintaining security and control, illustrating how language legitimises actions that might otherwise provoke criticism. As Fairclough (2003) highlights, language is a tool of power used to shape perceptions, justify policies, and assert dominance in conflicts.

This approach complements CDA by exploring how discourse shapes national identity and interests. The research analyses how Israeli rhetoric frames the Philadelphi Corridor within a broader national security and sovereignty narrative, reinforcing national and political identities. Constructivist discourse theory posits that framing issues reflects existing realities and actively constructs them. By portraying control of the corridor as essential to national security, Israeli discourse influences both domestic and international perceptions of its sovereignty claims. Sovereignty discourse is a core concept intertwined in this study. It represents a state's supreme authority over its territory. The research investigates how sovereignty is invoked as a legal or territorial claim and reconstructed through language to address contemporary geopolitical and security challenges. By combining CDA and constructivist discourse theory, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the Philadelphi Corridor conflict as a site of linguistic and political contestation. The framework reveals:

1. How language serves as a tool for constructing and legitimising sovereignty claims.
2. The role of discourse in shaping national identity and security strategies.
3. The interplay between power, language, and sovereignty discourse in regional dynamics.

Through this integrated theoretical lens, the study demonstrates how discourse is not merely a reflection of political reality but an active force in constructing and negotiating sovereignty, power, and identity in the context of the Philadelphi Corridor conflict.

Historical Background: What is Area D? Why is the Philadelphi Corridor sensitive to Egyptian National Security?

The Camp David Accords¹ between Egypt and Israel stipulated the identification of 4 areas on the border between Egypt and Israel as follows: Sinai, where the Egyptian army is based, is divided into zones A, B, and C. Area D is on the Palestinian side, and Israel is present in it; the Philadelphi Corridor is part of this area. Area A is the closest to the Suez Canal. It allows the presence of an Egyptian mechanised infantry division with a total of 22 thousand soldiers with military equipment, only 230 tanks, and a few hundred armoured vehicles. Area B: in the middle: it allows the presence

¹ The Camp David Accords were signed by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin on September 17, 1978, following 12 days of secret negotiations at Camp David. Both framework agreements were signed at the White House and witnessed by President Jimmy Carter. The second of these frameworks (a framework for concluding a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel) led directly to the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty for which Sadat and Begin shared the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize.

of 4 border guard battalions, with the presence of the Egyptian police, and no tanks are allowed. Area C is adjacent to the Egyptian border with Gaza, which allows the presence of only lightly armed Egyptian police forces.

Area D was under Israeli control until Israel withdrew from Gaza during the Sharon era in 2005. After Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, the area came under Palestinian administration. Area D contains four lightly armed infantry battalions, consisting of a maximum of 4 thousand Israeli soldiers, with light and limited weapons “carried on the shoulder” without any tanks, armoured vehicles, or air defence systems except missiles shoulder mounted. According to the agreement, only a limited number of forces with light weapons exist in these areas. Any presence of forces in these four areas without an agreement between Egypt and Israel is a violation of the agreement and a threat to it. Launching a military invasion in Area D, which includes tanks and heavy weapons, also violates the agreement. The agreement stipulates that any military presence in this area must be in consultation and agreement between the two countries.

During the comprehensive military operation carried out by the Egyptian army in Sinai in 2018, Egypt brought in military forces of up to 40,000 soldiers, which is double the number agreed upon in the Camp David Accords, to Area B and Area C on the border to confront the armed groups in Sinai, which was with Israel's approval, and Israel at the time provided reconnaissance support and air strikes carried out by the Egyptian army. As for Area D, When Israel wanted to start the military operation in Rafah, the Israeli media reported that the Israeli Chief of Staff, Halevi, and Ronen Bar, the director of the Shin Bet, went to Egypt to meet with the Egyptian Chief of Staff and the head of Egyptian intelligence. They reached an understanding regarding the expected military operation in Egypt. The Egyptian media or government did not respond to or deny these statements.

Sovereignty and Security: Using Sovereignty to Strengthen Control over Strategic Areas

Sovereignty is the supreme authority exercised by a state over its territory and population, embodied in political, legal, and administrative control (Krasner, 1999). Security guarantees the state's protection from internal and external threats, whether military, economic, or political (Buzan, 1991). Sovereignty and security intersect when states seek to secure their territories or expand their influence over strategic areas to advance their national interests. Strategic areas, such as borders or vital gateways, represent points of strength or weakness for the state. The control of these instruments allows for enhancing national security by preventing external interference or activities that threaten security, establishing geopolitical dominance by establishing influence in conflict zones or borders of military importance, and controlling economic resources if the region contains natural resources or logistics sites. In this sense, the Philadelphi Corridor stands out as a model for the exercise of sovereignty in ensuring security for both Egypt and Israel.

The Philadelphi Corridor, which extends along the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip, is considered a highly sensitive strategic area, as it constitutes an artery for smuggling weapons and goods. Controlling it is an Israeli tool to enhance its concept of sovereignty linked to security. In this case, we can understand sovereignty as a means to achieve military security, which is what we notice from the intense military presence, as Israel focused on deploying its forces and security control in the Philadelphi Corridor to ensure that weapons smuggling into Gaza is prevented. Statements by Israeli officials also indicated the destruction of hundreds of tunnels located in the Gaza Strip, reflecting an attempt to establish complete security control over the area (BBC, 2024). Here, we notice the establishment of sovereignty to impose geopolitical influence by strengthening regional influence. Control of the Philadelphi Corridor shows Israel's desire to assert its sovereignty over the border areas with Egypt and the Gaza Strip, which reflects the connection between the concept of sovereignty and the desire for geopolitical hegemony.

Naturally, cooperation or conflict with Egypt over control of this area reflects the balance of sovereignty between the two states, ensuring the protection of each country's national interests (Alhurra, 2024). We cannot ignore linking sovereignty to economic and political dimensions and its role in redrawing economic geography, which is evident in the construction of roads such as the "David's Corridor," which shows how control of the Philadelphi Corridor is used as a means to change the geographical and political reality in the region, enhancing the permanent Israeli presence (Al Mayadeen, 2024). In border disputes, such as the case of the Philadelphi Corridor, sovereignty is used to justify military and political actions. This is evident in the security discourse associated with sovereignty, which appears in Netanyahu's description of the corridor as " Hamas' oxygen tube," making control over it a strategic necessity (Alhurra, 2024). Control over strategic areas is also portrayed as a condition for ensuring national security, which justifies military interventions or regional expansion, reflecting the state of combining security and sovereignty.

Although using sovereignty to enhance control over strategic areas may enhance national security, problems are associated with this. These include regional conflicts that often lead to the exacerbation of tensions with neighbouring countries. With these international legal challenges, absolute sovereignty may clash with international laws that prohibit long-term occupation or the use of disproportionate force, as well as with social and political costs such as internal conflicts and popular resistance, as in the case of Gaza. Sovereignty is not a static concept but rather a tool that can be used to achieve security, especially in strategic areas. However, this use carries geopolitical and moral implications. In the case of the Philadelphi Corridor, sovereignty represents an Israeli tool to enhance national security and impose regional influence. Still, it raises questions about its legitimacy and its implications for regional stability.

Analysis of ideas: Language as a tool of power, media, and political framing, symbolism, and ideology

As mentioned, language is a fundamental tool for enhancing power and legitimising policies by constructing perceptions that facilitate public acceptance of specific political or military actions. In political and security discourse, policies are justified using vocabulary and frames that enhance the legitimacy of political action. Examples from security and military policy: In conflict contexts, language frames the enemy as an existential threat. For example, Israel used strong language to describe the Philadelphi corridor as " Hamas' oxygen tube," reinforcing the importance of military control over it to ensure national security (RT Arabic, 2024). This language transforms a geographical issue into an existential security issue, suggesting that controlling the axis is not just a security measure but an existential necessity. The Egyptian discourse focused on a balanced discourse through the use of terms such as "respect for international agreements" and "self-restraint," reflecting an attempt to balance national sovereignty with regional and international obligations (Al Mayadeen, 2024), which aims to affirm Egyptian sovereignty while avoiding direct escalation.

The language used here is not neutral; instead, it is a tool for reshaping social and political reality. Security policies are viewed as necessary measures that are not open to debate. Using escalators or moderate language also directs public debate toward specific positions. Media framing refers to how events are presented to guide the public's understanding, as media and political framing is a tool for shaping how the public understands events and conflicts. This is done by selecting information, highlighting certain aspects, and ignoring others (Entman, 1993). Framing contributes to presenting narratives that highlight the actors' positions and enhance their public support. Here, we can stand on different types of framing, such as conflict framing, which highlights the other party as an enemy that threatens security; solution framing, which highlights diplomatic or military initiatives as a means to achieve stability; and legitimacy framing, which shows policies as part of legal and moral

obligations. Here, we can compare the framing of events in the Egyptian and Israeli discourse as follows:

The Israeli media focused on broadcasting scenes showing complete military control of the Philadelphi corridor, reinforcing the image of power and control (RT Arabic, 2024). Gaza was also framed as a continuing source of threat, justifying any military escalation, with an emphasis on destroying the tunnels to prevent arms smuggling and harm Israel's security. (BBC, 2024).

The media focused on Egypt's role as a mediator to achieve regional stability. Any developments were also framed as part of Egypt's international obligations, reflecting a discourse that balances sovereignty with maintaining stable international relations (Alhurra, 2024). Terms such as "diplomatic solutions" and "respect for treaties" framed the Egyptian position as moderate and responsible. Symbolism and ideology contribute to shaping political and social meanings and justifying political decisions, as symbols and ideological vocabulary are used to promote concepts such as security and sovereignty, making them central to political discourse. Symbolism simplifies complex issues and makes them understandable to the general public. The impact of symbolism and ideology is reflected in several axes, such as strengthening national identity through symbols that enhance feelings of belonging and loyalty, framing actions as a necessity through the use of symbolism that makes policies appear as part of a national or religious commitment, and legitimising actions through the use of symbols to convince local and international audiences of the legitimacy of actions.

Israel has used powerful symbols such as the "lifeline" and the "oxygen tube" to describe the Philadelphi Corridor, reflecting strategic importance beyond the geographical dimension and employing symbolism that emphasises that controlling it is not just a military decision but a matter of national survival. The nationalist and religious language was also employed to enhance the legitimacy of control, as Israeli discourse used vocabulary with religious or nationalist connotations to enhance the legitimacy of discourse, such as using expressions such as "the Land of Israel" to link political actions to historical and religious ideologies (RT Arabic, 2024). Meanwhile, Egypt focused on the symbolism of "regional stability," "Arab national security," and the "Camp David Accords" as a framework that strengthens its diplomatic and political position and confirms its commitment to international legitimacy and sovereignty. This symbolism enhances Egypt's role as a protector of stability in the region (Al Mayadeen, 2024). In the conflict over the Philadelphi Corridor, complex interactions between language, framing, and symbolism appear to enhance sovereignty, justify their positions, and enhance their legitimacy, as both sides used language that legitimises their actions and presents the other as a threat. Israeli media focused on military success, while Egyptian media presented a consensual position that balances between preserving sovereignty and appeasement. On the other hand, Israel emphasised the centrality of the Axis to national security, while Egypt focused on its role in preserving regional stability. The dispute over the Philadelphi Axis highlights the role of discourse in enshrining sovereignty and security, but it also raises questions about the impact of these narratives on regional relations.

Analysis of ideas: Transnational security challenges, the balance between security and sovereignty, human security versus traditional security

Transnational security challenges are among states' most prominent issues in light of increasing global interconnectedness. As Buzan (1991) explains, these challenges include threats such as arms smuggling, terrorism, and organised crime that transcend the sovereignty of a single state and affect regional stability. The Philadelphi Corridor, a strategic corridor between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, has emerged as a major theatre for transnational security challenges for Israel, as reports show that the tunnels extending through the corridor are used to smuggle weapons and goods, which poses a direct threat to Israel and its internal stability according to Israeli statements (Al Mayadeen, 2024).

The Israeli discourse justified the Israeli military intervention in the Philadelphi Corridor by focusing on the need to destroy the tunnels to stop the flow of weapons to Hamas, describing the tunnels as an “oxygen pipe” that feeds Hamas’s military capabilities (RT Arabic, 2024). This discourse reflects an attempt to justify the military intervention based on a cross-border security threat. For Egypt, the tunnels threatened Sinai’s security, as they were also used to transport armed elements, prompting Egypt to emphasise the importance of combating smuggling to enhance its regional stability (Alhurra, 2024). At the same time, the Philadelphi Corridor is a regional security issue. The Egyptian discourse emphasised the importance of stopping illegal activities in the tunnels to prevent destabilisation in Sinai and maintain national security (Al Mayadeen, 2024).

The balance between security and sovereignty is a central dilemma in the modern context. Sovereignty is traditionally defined as the absolute right of a state to control its territory without external interference. Still, security imperatives justify military interventions in the face of security threats. As Holsti (1996) points out, security can be used as an argument to reduce or redefine sovereignty to suit current threats. States face pressure to achieve national security while maintaining respect for territorial sovereignty. According to Heumann (1995), security imperatives often justify military interventions, but this can diminish national sovereignty.

When analysing Israeli discourse, we find that Israel has adopted a discourse that justifies its control of the Philadelphi Corridor on the pretext of preventing security threats posed by tunnels. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used expressions such as “security above all else,” stressing that control of the corridor is necessary to protect the Israeli population from security threats resulting from arms smuggling (BBC, 2024). In the case of Egyptian discourse, we note Egypt’s efforts to reconcile the necessities of national security and respect for its sovereignty, as it stressed its commitment to international agreements, such as the Camp David Accords, while strengthening security measures in Sinai (Al Mayadeen, 2024), and stressed the importance of adhering to international agreements while highlighting its sovereign position in the face of any escalation (Alhurra, 2024). In this case, the dilemmas resulting from this balance between security and sovereignty appear about the legitimacy of military interventions that raise questions about their compatibility with international law and respect for the sovereignty of neighbouring countries, in addition to the risks to regional stability, as excessive focus on security may exacerbate regional conflicts rather than resolve them.

While traditional security focuses on protecting the state from external threats, human security prioritises the protection of individuals from direct threats that affect their lives and well-being, including poverty, hunger, and economic insecurity (UNDP, 1994). Israeli control of the Philadelphi Corridor has directly affected Gazans, who rely on tunnels as a means of mitigating the effects of the blockade. According to human rights reports, the destruction of the tunnels has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, with unemployment and poverty rates rising sharply (Human Rights Watch, 2024). This exacerbates the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, which has been suffering from an ongoing war since October 2023 until the time of writing this study in January 2025.

While Israel focused on traditional security by preventing the smuggling of weapons so that Hamas would not use them to confront Israel during the war, this undermined the human security of the people of Gaza and affected the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which suffers from a shortage of basic foodstuffs as Israel’s war on the Gaza Strip continues, closing all crossings and preventing humanitarian aid from entering Gaza. In contrast, Egypt called for restraint and searching for solutions that balance traditional security requirements and the local population’s humanitarian needs (Alhurra, 2024). Here, the Egyptian position seems confused. While Egypt calls for achieving a balance between security and humanitarian needs, we find that Egypt closes the Rafah land crossing on the Egyptian border with the Gaza Strip and prevents the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Therefore, the Egyptian statements contradict Egypt's ability to contribute to alleviating the humanitarian situation of the people of Gaza. This results in narrowing the economic options for local populations and putting them in a predicament in obtaining basic food needs. On the other hand, this situation enhances the increase in polarisation, as the tensions resulting from the intensive security policies reinforce anger and resentment among the affected populations.

The Role of Legitimacy in Disputes: Political Discourse as a Tool to Enhance Military Control

In the case of the Philadelphi Corridor, Israel and Egypt used a political discourse focused on national security and sovereignty to enhance the legitimacy of their control over the corridor. Israel linked the legitimacy of its presence in the Philadelphi Corridor to the need to prevent arms smuggling to Hamas, which presents its discourse as protecting its citizens. At the same time, Egypt, for its part, justified the heightened security measures as necessary to protect its borders and prevent terrorist threats. Here, we note that political discourses relied on national symbols and vocabulary that enhance the sense of external danger to justify military actions. Legitimacy was also used to reduce opposition by relying on political discourse that links control to security and sovereignty, which helps governments reduce domestic and international opposition by showing that the measures taken are not only legal but also necessary. 2. The Relationship between Legitimacy and Security: The Impact of Control of the Philadelphi Corridor on the Legitimacy of Governments in the Eyes of Their People.

Legitimacy and security are often closely linked, with governments' ability to achieve security being seen as an indicator of their legitimacy. As Beetham (1991) points out, the erosion of security weakens governments' legitimacy, while security successes enhance it. For Israel, control of the Philadelphi Corridor has been presented as a means of enhancing national security. By controlling the corridor and destroying the tunnels, the Israeli government seeks to enhance its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens by presenting itself as a protector of security and stability. However, failure to return detainees or deal with ongoing threats undermines the legitimacy of the Israeli leadership in the eyes of its public. On the Egyptian side, controlling the border with Gaza is part of a broader strategy to enhance the government's legitimacy by combating terrorism and protecting national security. However, the humanitarian challenges facing Gazans sometimes lead to international criticism that may undermine Egypt's international legitimacy, primarily since it controls the Rafah crossing, which is the main conduit for humanitarian aid entering the Gaza Strip and the only exit for Gazans who want to leave the Strip.

International legitimacy depends on how much states' actions conform to international laws and standards. In the Philadelphi Corridor context, Israel and Egypt face challenges in maintaining their international legitimacy. Israel's practices of military control of the corridor and destruction of tunnels are considered justified in terms of its domestic legitimacy. Still, they face international criticism for violating human rights and international humanitarian law. The international community, including the United Nations and human rights organisations, often opposes Israel's policies in Gaza and sees them as exacerbating the humanitarian crisis, which undermines Israel's legitimacy in the international arena. Although Egypt presents its security discourse as a justification for controlling the border, international criticism of the increasing humanitarian blockade on Gaza poses a challenge to its international legitimacy. Egypt is seen as a mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which enhances its international role. Still, its border policies with Gaza may undermine this role if they violate international standards. Based on the above, Political legitimacy is a key element in border disputes, as political discourses enhance the legitimacy of military and security policies. In the case of the Philadelphi Corridor, Israel, and Egypt sought to achieve legitimacy for their actions by focusing on security and sovereignty. Still, they faced challenges in reconciling

domestic and international legitimacy. This highlights the importance of balancing security with respect for international laws and norms to enhance legitimacy at all levels.

Public Diplomacy and Its Impact on Political Discourse on the Philadelphi Corridor

Public diplomacy plays a pivotal role in influencing international public opinion, especially in conflicts involving political and security complexities such as control of the Philadelphi Corridor. According to Nye (2004), public diplomacy relies on delivering messages highlighting the state's goals and enhancing its international image. In Israeli statements, Benjamin Netanyahu used rhetoric linking the control of the Philadelphi Corridor to the fight against terrorism, stressing that the corridor represents " Hamas' oxygen pipe that must be cut" (Alhurra, 2024). These statements aim to gain the international community's support by linking the issue to the fight against terrorism, a framework that resonates positively globally. Official Egyptian statements focused on portraying Israeli intervention as a threat to national sovereignty and regional stability. For example, in July 2024, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticised continued Israeli control and stressed the need to respect Palestinian and Egyptian sovereignty in the region (RT Arabic, 2024). This speech sought to direct international public opinion toward pressuring Israel to reconsider its policies. However, she quickly stopped making these statements.

According to Nye (2004), soft power is used to influence through cultural appeal and moral values, while hard power relies on military and political pressure. In the conflict over the Philadelphi Corridor, Israel relied on hard power by taking military control of the axis. Still, it justified this move using soft power by promoting security and moral justifications through the media and statements by officials, such as Itamar Ben-Gvir, who described taking control of the axis as a step to ensure "victory in the war" against Hamas (CNN Arabic, 2024). It can be said that Israel used media and diplomatic tools to market its control of the Philadelphi Corridor as a necessary step to protect security and stability in the region, and it also sought to promote positions that confine its axis within the context of the "war on terror" and combating arms smuggling. It also used rhetoric highlighting humanitarian efforts through attempts to deliver humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, adding a moral dimension to this military operation.

In contrast, Egypt has used soft power tools to strengthen its position internationally, insisting on the need for peaceful solutions and respect for international law, as stated by Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry, who called for "de-escalation" and "respect for international agreements related to borders" (RT Arabic, 2024). As for hard power, Israel relies heavily on its military might to ensure control over vital areas such as the Philadelphi Corridor. Meanwhile, Egypt uses hard power through direct interaction with Israel on the security and political levels to ensure that its interests in the region are not harmed. Ethical challenges are an essential part of analysing public diplomacy in such conflicts. Israel, despite its emphasis on the need to enhance security, has faced international criticism regarding the humanitarian impact of military operations in the region. Global media outlets have highlighted concerns about the extent of destruction and human losses in the Gaza Strip. On the other hand, Israel has used a discourse that emphasises "self-defence" and the need to "achieve security" for its citizens, creating justification for its military practices in this context.

Egypt had to balance maintaining its international relations, especially with major powers, with confronting challenges related to its sovereignty over its territory and protecting the Sinai population from any repercussions of the expansion of the Israeli military footprint in the region. Egyptian sovereignty over the Philadelphi Corridor has been portrayed in Egyptian discourse as protecting national security and maintaining regional stability. From the above, public diplomacy emerges as a strategic tool in international conflicts, where states use soft and hard power to strengthen their positions. In the conflict over the Philadelphi Axis, both sides have resorted to public diplomacy to

justify their actions and steer international public opinion. However, the ethical challenge remains in balancing security interests and respect for human rights.

Conclusion

This study has analysed Egypt's and Israel's sovereignty discourses in the context of Israel's control over the Philadelphi Corridor during the 2023 Gaza War. The findings illustrate the evolving relationship between sovereignty discourse and security, emphasising its use as a strategic tool for national security goals, especially in geopolitically sensitive regions. Both Israel and Egypt utilised sovereignty discourse to justify their actions. Israel framed its control of the Philadelphi Corridor as essential for counterterrorism and border security, emphasising terms like oxygen pipe for Hamas to legitimise military measures. These narratives reflect sovereignty discourse to reinforce territorial control and safeguard national interests. Conversely, Egypt balanced national security needs with adherence to international agreements, projecting a commitment to regional stability. However, its practices, such as the closure of the Rafah crossing, revealed contradictions between political rhetoric and actions on the ground.

A critical tension emerged between protecting state-centric traditional security and addressing human security concerns. Israel's military measures to secure its borders aggravated humanitarian crises in Gaza, undermining the human security of its population. Similarly, Egypt's restrictive policies, while aimed at maintaining stability, failed to mitigate the suffering of Gaza residents, highlighting the limitations of traditional security approaches in addressing modern humanitarian challenges. The study underscores the symbolic and political dimensions of discourse. Israel legitimised its policies using strategic language tied to nationalist and religious ideologies, while Egypt maintained its diplomatic stance using terms like "regional stability" and "international legitimacy." These discourses shaped perceptions of sovereignty, framing it as both a political claim and a justification for action.

While Egypt's discourse often advocated for stability and international norms, its restrictive actions, such as blocking humanitarian aid, contradicted these principles. This disconnect between rhetoric and practice underscores the complexities in aligning policy narratives with ground realities. Using sovereignty discourse to justify security measures raises significant legal and ethical questions. Actions that undermine human security and exacerbate regional tensions highlight the need for frameworks that align state sovereignty with international law and human rights principles. This research concludes that sovereignty is not a fixed concept but a dynamic and contested tool. Its employment in the Philadelphi Corridor conflict demonstrates its dual role in justifying military interventions and fostering diplomatic cooperation. However, these uses often conflict with humanitarian needs and international norms, complicating efforts to achieve sustainable regional stability. Future policies should integrate security objectives concerning human rights and international standards to address these challenges. By balancing sovereignty with considerations for human security, regional actors can move toward a more stable and cooperative framework that supports national and human interests.

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