The Mediatisation of MFAS: Diplomacy in the New Media Ecology

Ilan Manor

University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom

manor.ilan@gmail.com

Rhys Crilley

The Open University, Milton Keynes, United Kingdom

rhys.crilley@open.ac.uk

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Summary

The proliferation of social media has had a profound impact on the practice of diplomacy; diplomats can bypass the press and communicate their messages directly to online audiences. Subsequently, ministries of foreign affairs (MFAS) are now mediatised; they produce media content, circulate content through social media and adopt media logics in their daily operations. Through a case study of the Israeli MFA during the 2014 Gaza War, this article explores the mediatisation of MFAS. It does so by analysing how the Israeli MFA crafted frames through which online audiences could understand the war and demonstrates that these frames evolved as the conflict unfolded. It then draws attention to the important way in which MFAS are now media actors through a statistical analysis, which demonstrates that the use of images in tweets increased engagement with the Israeli MFA's frames. Finally, the article illustrates how these frames were used to legitimize Israel's actions, and delegitimise those of Hamas.

Keywords

mediatisation – ministries of foreign affairs (MFAS) – digital diplomacy – Israel/Palestine – Gaza War – Framing Theory – social media

1 Introduction

In October 2009, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) joined Twitter. By January 2019, it had tweeted over 19,000 times and amassed over 167,000 followers. The use of Twitter is now of 'central importance' to the daily activities of the Israeli MFA due to its 'awesome potential and impact'.¹ The phenomena of digital diplomacy is not isolated to Israel, and in 2018 there were '856 Twitter accounts belonging to heads of state and government, and foreign ministers in 178 countries, representing 92 per cent of all UN member states, with a combined audience of 356 million followers'.² The global spread of social media platforms has subsequently had a profound impact on diplomacy and a burgeoning literature on digital diplomacy has provided important insights into making sense of these practices.³

The rise of digital diplomacy is grounded in the emergence of web 2.0 technologies such as social media that facilitate and are reliant on the active participation of individuals.⁴ These have proved a formidable challenge to MFAS in several respects. First, web 2.0 technologies fragmented audiences of diplomacy into 'networks of selective exposure'.⁵ Second, web 2.0 technologies enabled new actors to frame, or narrate, world events in ways that often negated those of states⁶ — as was the case during the Arab Spring.⁷ Third, citizen journalists could use web 2.0 technologies to report on world events as they unfolded on the ground,⁸ and soon traditional media organisations who migrated online also adopted this practice of real-time journalism.⁹ Fourth, following in the footsteps of marketers, media organisations increasingly relied on visual media to drive engagement on social media.¹⁰ As such, MFAS found themselves operating in a complex media ecology in which they were confronted with new platforms (social media), new actors (citizen journalists), new practices (real-time coverage of events) and new methods for attracting audiences (use of visuals). This article asserts that to contend with this complex reality, MFAS migrated to social media sites. Subsequently, MFAS have become mediatised

1 Manor 2014.

2 Twiplomacy 2017.

3 Manor 2016; Kampf, Manor and Segev, 2015; Bjola and Holmes 2015.

4 Mandiberg 2012.

5 Hayden 2012, 2.

6 Stoltzfus 2008; Seib 2016; Meraz and Papacharissi 2013.

7 Hamdy and Gomaa 2012, 195–211; Seib 2012.

8 Causey and Howard 2013; Xiguang and Jing 2010.

9 Seib 2012.

10 De Vries, Gensler and Leeftang 2012; Sabate et al. 2014.

in that the logic of media now informs their online activities and has led to the formation of new diplomatic practices.¹¹

This article contributes to understanding the complexity of the contemporary diplomacy landscape by theorising the mediatisation of MFAS in the context of digital diplomacy. The authors understand MFAS not as single monolithic units but as complex institutions that function

as filters through which messages pass between the domestic and foreign environment; as repositories of skills in terms of policy advice on international issues; and as the respective loci of national institutional memory in the conduct of foreign affairs ... that are aimed at administering state-to-state interactions according to long established procedures and routines.¹²

In light of this, the authors argue that understanding the complexity of diplomacy in the 21st century requires a recognition that MFAS are now media actors that produce and circulate their own media content directly to social media audiences and adopt media logics in their daily operations. Notably, it is the authors' contention that the mediatisation of MFAS has evolved from a broadcast model that emphasised interactions with media gatekeepers, to a network model that prioritises real-time framing and interactions with diverse audiences.¹³ They draw on recent scholarship on mediatisation to make sense of how diplomacy is evolving as MFAS utilise social media on a regular basis. They then demonstrate the conceptual utility of mediatisation through a case study of the Israeli MFA twitter activity during the Gaza War of 2014. Finally, they discuss what the mediatisation of MFAS means for the study of diplomacy in the 21st century.

2 Mediatisation and Digital Diplomacy

Recently, the study of diplomacy has been enriched by an attention to the role of media and communication in practices that have come to be known as 'public diplomacy',¹⁴ 'nation branding'¹⁵ and 'digital diplomacy'.¹⁶ This work often

11 Pamment 2014b; Constantinou 2018.

12 Hocking 2007, 14; Bátorá 2008.

13 Chadwick 2017.

14 Cull 2009.

15 Aronczyk 2013.

16 Bjola and Holmes 2015.

focuses on interpreting and analysing the content of public diplomacy campaigns, discussing the persuasive potential of such campaigns¹⁷ or discussing how they enable new forms of participation for audiences.¹⁸ Despite this, there has been a limited engagement with media and communication theories that could enhance our understanding of how diplomacy is evolving in the context of new communication technologies.¹⁹ This article addresses this gap by drawing on theories of mediatization to explore how MFAS' communicative logic and procedures have changed since the advent of social media.

Mediatization has been central to communications research for decades,²⁰ and is generally understood to refer to a 'long-lasting process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media's influence'.²¹ There are two broad traditions of mediatization research, both of which are important for understanding MFAS in the 21st century. First, there is an institutional approach to mediatization that understands the media as a more or less independent social institution with its own rules, norms and logics.²² Mediatization in this tradition refers to different social fields and systems (e.g., politics, war, religion and sport) adopting a 'media logic'²³ of 'institutionalized formats and forms of staging'²⁴ where non-media actors (e.g., politicians, armies, churches and athletes) have to adopt and conform to 'media's rules, aims, production logics, and constraints'²⁵ if they want to be successful 'in a media culture and media society'.²⁶ A second approach to mediatization explores the role of media 'as part of the process of the communicative construction of social and cultural reality'.²⁷ In this understanding of mediatization, it is not simply that institutions adopt media logics, but that social, political and cultural reality is manifested in media processes.²⁸ There subsequently has been research into how

17 Bjola and Jiang 2015; Manor 2017.

18 Pamment 2014a; Pamment and Cassinger 2018.

19 Pamment 2016.

20 Couldry and Hepp 2013.

21 Hjarvard 2008, 14.

22 Hjarvard 2008, 110.

23 Altheide 2013, 223.

24 Couldry and Hepp 2013, 196.

25 Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999, 249.

26 Couldry and Hepp 2013, 196.

27 Couldry and Hepp 2013, 196.

28 Hepp 2013.

a diverse range of social phenomenon, such as politics, war, health, tourism, science, sport²⁹ and, of course, diplomacy,³⁰ have become mediated.

To develop insights into the mediatization of diplomacy, the authors focus their attention on understanding the mediatization of MFAS in the 21st century. By drawing on the two traditions of mediatization, they suggest that there are two central ways by which we can see the impact of mediatization on MFAS. First, MFAS have adopted media logics and utilise media for their own purposes. Second, mediatization has led to the reality of diplomacy becoming manifest in media that have consequences 'for the overall process whereby [the] sociocultural reality [of diplomacy] is constructed in and through communication'.³¹ One way to make sense of this form of mediatization of MFAS is to draw on framing theory to understand how MFAS use social media to frame themselves, their nations' actions and the identities and actions of other actors in global politics.

Framing theory is grounded in the works of Erving Goffman who posited that individuals constantly strive to make sense of the world around them. To do so, they employ cognitive schemes or frameworks that enable them to classify and interpret information.³² Goffman's work suggests that framing is an instrument of power as it shapes peoples' world views, opinions and actions.³³ According to Robert Entman, to frame is

to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.³⁴

Markedly, framing rests on selection, exclusion and emphasis as communicators choose which information to include, which to omit and which to highlight through repetition.³⁵ In framing events and issues, MFAS seek to claim legitimacy for their actions and interests, so that they can obtain their foreign policy goals. This is particularly evident during times of crisis.³⁶

29 Deacon and Stanyer 2014.

30 Pamment 2014b.

31 Couldry and Hepp 2013, 196.

32 Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007; Goffman 1974.

33 Garrison 2001; Entman 1993.

34 Entman 1993, 52.

35 De Vreese, Peter and Semetko 2001.

36 Reus-Smit 2007.

3 Mediatisation in Times of Crisis

The mediatisation of diplomacy predates the process of digitalisation. During the age of television, the relationship between the media and diplomats was two-directional. On the one hand, studies have shown that televised news reporting influenced diplomats' policies. Through its reporting, televised news could focus public attention on certain issues. As an issue begun to dominate societal conversations, and as public opinion rallied in favour of a certain course of action, diplomats formulated corresponding policies. For instance, the 24-hour news cycle brought about by CNN and the like in the 1990s focused public attention on humanitarian crises, leading to US diplomatic interventions to end humanitarian suffering. The diplomats' need to respond to heightened media attention was thus referred to as the 'CNN effect'.³⁷

On the other hand, administrations and diplomats sought to shape media coverage of foreign policy issues. To do so, administrations used frames when commenting on foreign policy matters hoping that journalists would adopt and disseminate these frames to their audiences. Moreover, diplomats used frames as these helped journalists identify the administration's goals, given that journalists rely on frames when communicating issues to the public.³⁸ By using frames to comment on foreign policy issues, MFAS became mediatized in that they adopted the logic of media institutions as well as their practices.

However, the migration of MFAS to social media has significantly impacted their mediatization, in terms of logic and in terms of practices. Such is the case with diplomats' use of social media during times of crisis. Interviews conducted with the present and former directors of Israel's digital diplomacy unit suggest that social media have impacted the mediatization of MFAS in four ways.

First, MFA crisis communication traditionally prioritized engagement with gatekeepers such as global media institutions and journalists. Through such interactions, diplomats hoped to influence the public's perception of a crisis, legitimise their nation's policies and rally support for these policies. Media studies have found that diplomats often label events as crises given that the media tend to rally around the flag during national crises and support the administration's policies. Moreover, journalists are unlikely to criticise the administration until after a crisis ends.³⁹ Yet social media now enable MFAS to communicate with several audiences, including media institutions, domestic populations and foreign populations, while influencing all these audiences' perceptions of

37 Brewer 2006; Gilboa 2005; Robinson 1999.

38 Dimitrova et al. 2005; Entman 2004; Wood and Peake 1998.

39 Bloch-Elkon 2007; Lee and Yang 1996.

a crisis. In this way, MFAS may now bypass traditional gatekeepers and directly interact with online publics.⁴⁰

Second, social media have necessitated that MFAS comment on events and issues as they unfold throughout a crisis. The need to practice near real-time diplomacy arose from the fact that news organisations and citizen journalists used social media to narrate events as they unfolded during the Arab Spring, the Iranian Green protests and the colour revolution in Ukraine.⁴¹ Third, MFAS now project competing frames while attempting to win the support of online audiences for their nations' policies. These contestations see MFAS compete against citizen journalists and media institutions who also attempt to shape the world views of social media users during a crisis. Finally, MFAS are now visual narrators who rely on images to frame a crisis. The adoption of multimedia was a necessity given that new media use visuals to attract online attention.⁴²

In summary, while the goals of MFA framing during a crisis have remained the same since the 1990s broadcast era, with diplomats hoping to shape public perception of events and win support for their policies, social media have diversified the audiences that diplomats interact with, the speed at which they must frame events, the number of actors they compete with and the tools through which they can attract attention to their frames. Social media have also lessened diplomats' reliance on the media to transmit frames to domestic and foreign populations. This article therefore argues that the mediatisation of MFAS has evolved from the broadcast model of the CNN effect — where MFAS worked with the media to broadcast messages — to the 21st-century network model of real-time framing on social media — where, in what Andrew Chadwick calls the hybrid media system,⁴³ MFAS are among many actors who use media tools to influence online audiences.

Importantly, this article draws a distinction between crisis framing via Twitter and Twitter-mediated public diplomacy. During crises, MFAS may use Twitter to articulate a nation's interests, justify its use of force and offer an interpretation of unfolding events. Such activities may create a receptive environment for a nation's policies among online audiences. Framing is thus a one-directional process in which MFAS seek to influence the world views and behaviours of social media users. Conversely, Twitter-mediated public diplomacy is a two-directional process in which diplomats seek to establish relationships with foreign populations through dialogue to facilitate the acceptance

40 Hocking and Melissen 2015.

41 Seib 2012.

42 Sharp 2005.

43 Chadwick 2017.

of their nation's foreign policy.⁴⁴ Thus, while the goals of Twitter framing and public diplomacy may be similar, the logic employed is quite different.

4 The Mediatisation of MFAS

Following James Pamment's argument that mediatisation has led to shifting ontological and epistemological conditions for conducting diplomacy, this article suggests that if we are to understand contemporary diplomacy, we need to understand how MFAS utilise social media as well as how these social media now constitute diplomacy itself. According to Pamment, there are three key ways in which mediatisation has impacted diplomacy. The first is through a proliferation of channels and media by which diplomats and MFAS can relay information directly to their audiences.⁴⁵ The second main impact concerns the way in which diplomats and MFAS are no longer versed only in 'elite protocol, etiquette, and languages'⁴⁶ but also in the vernacular conventions of social media. Indeed, communicative and media practices are no longer confined to media specialists and press teams but are 'ubiquitous across an organization'.⁴⁷ Third, mediatisation has altered the communication and political economic environment in which diplomacy takes place. Here, MFAS 'are increasingly forced to adapt to, internalise and reproduce a variety of mediated codes and norms, simply because they have come to appear normal or common sense'.⁴⁸

The mediatisation of diplomacy has also seen the mediatisation of MFAS as the adoption of media logics influences the structure, working routines and norms of diplomats. Structurally, digital diplomacy units are often located within MFA communications directorates and are headed by media specialists. Such is the case with the digital diplomacy units of Finland, Israel, Norway and Poland, which also consist mostly of public relations experts or former journalists.⁴⁹ The structure of digital units and their positioning within communications directorates suggest that they were originally viewed as one more element in the MFAS' overall media outreach and that they were imbued with the knowledge and skills necessary to construct and disseminate frames.

With regard to working procedures, MFAS create, disseminate, evaluate and discard frames in real time. The authors' interviews suggest that the Israeli

44 Pamment 2012; Melissen 2005.

45 Pamment 2014b.

46 Pamment 2014b, 268.

47 Pamment 2014b, 270.

48 Pamment 2014b, 274.

49 Manor 2016, 40–78.

digital diplomacy unit does this through the use of social media analytics software. Moreover, digital diplomacy units use social media to analyse the frames disseminated by their peers. The Polish MFA, for instance, routinely analysed how Russia framed the 2014 Crimean crisis.⁵⁰ Similarly, members of the Israeli MFA routinely interact with media institutions on social media and urge them to alter their framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For example, one member of the digital unit has consistently used Twitter to urge the BBC to use the word ‘terrorists’ rather than ‘assailants’ when reporting on terror attacks in Israel. MFAS thus engage in real-time framing competitions. Finally, MFAS target their frames at specific audiences, and then adjust these frames based on audience feedback. MFAS have thus adopted the norm of tailoring digital content to audience interest while valuing audience feedback, much like new media institutions.⁵¹

This article furthers the nascent work on the mediatization of diplomacy by empirically exploring how mediatization has impacted on the actions of the Israeli MFA during times of crisis. Through an analysis of the tweets published by the Israeli MFA during the Gaza War of 2014, the article demonstrates how the mediatization of the MFA has evolved towards a 21st-century network model of real-time framing. It does so by exploring how a digital media logic now permeates the Israeli MFA and is apparent in their production and dissemination of real-time frames and their use of multimedia to drive audience engagement.

4.1 *The Mediatization of the Israeli MFA and the Gaza War of 2014*

Whilst the mediatization of MFAS has been a global phenomenon, this article focuses on the Israeli MFA to elucidate the authors’ theory and to provide an in-depth case study of MFA mediatization. The Israeli MFA is an important actor to study due to its innovative use of social media for state purposes.⁵² Indeed, the Israeli MFA was the first to create a unit of algorithmic diplomacy that develops algorithms that interface with social media sites. The MFA has also pioneered the use of network analysis to combat hate speech online while relying on peer-to-peer diplomacy to interact with audiences that are critical of Israel.⁵³

This research is focused on the Israeli MFA’s use of Twitter during the Gaza War of 2014. The authors chose this time frame given an understanding that

50 Manor 2016, 45.

51 Manor 2019.

52 Kuntsman and Stein 2015; Stein 2017; Manor and Crilley 2018.

53 Manor 2019, 135-176.

the MFA would be engrossed in the practice of crafting, disseminating and updating frames while attempting to drive audience engagement and claim legitimacy for Israel's use of force. Building from the authors' understanding of mediatisation, their research was guided by two research questions that aimed to explore both the institutional and social constructivist theories of mediatisation:

RQ1: How has the Israeli MFA become a media actor adopting a media logic?

RQ2: How does the social media content produced by the Israeli MFA socially construct diplomacy?

In approaching these questions, the authors made several hypotheses. Following the logic of institutional mediatisation, political actors are mediatised when they utilise media to frame events and actions. Yet mediatisation also demands that political actors frame events as they unfold so as to compete with new media actors. Subsequently, the authors hypothesised:

H1: The Israeli MFA will frame events so as to offer social media followers an interpretation of events and will update these frames in near real time.

Furthermore, because social media sites are inherently visual platforms,⁵⁴ photographs and videos are integrated into social media content so as to drive audience engagement which, in turn, may facilitate influence. The authors therefore hypothesised that:

H2: The Israeli MFA will use visual media to drive audience engagement.

The authors' final hypothesis concerned their second research question. Here, following an understanding that framing actors, actions and events is integral to how political actors claim legitimacy for the use of force,⁵⁵ they argue that social media produced by MFAS socially constructs new practices of diplomacy by which MFAS make legitimisation claims directly to their social media audiences. Their final hypothesis was subsequently:

54 Murray 2008.

55 Armstrong and Farrell 2005; Gillespie et al. 2010; Hurrell 2005; Reus-Smit 2007.

H3: The Israeli MFA will claim legitimacy for their actions while delegitimising those of their adversaries.

Whilst this hypothesis is intuitive, as explored below, understanding how exactly MFAS articulate legitimisation claims is important. Fundamentally, such legitimisation claims on social media need to be recognised as integral to contemporary diplomacy and MFAS, rather than being seen as superfluous.

The authors focused their analysis on Twitter for three reasons. First, studies suggest that Twitter is used by diplomats to immediately comment on important events while other social media are then used to elaborate on these events. Second, MFAS are generally more active on Twitter than on other social media sites. Finally, much of the content published by MFAS on Twitter is later published on other social media sites.⁵⁶ By analysing the Israeli MFA's Twitter activities, the authors were thus able to examine the evolution of MFA mediation while relying on a research corpus that included most of the MFA's frames.

5 Methodology

To answer the research questions, the authors first used the TwimeMachine application to scrape all Israeli MFA tweets published during the Gaza War of 2014. The scraping took place in September 2014 and all tweets originated from the MFA's main English account (@IsraelMFA). In total, the research corpus included 792 tweets published between 29 June 2014 and 31 August 2014. These tweets were collaboratively coded by the authors during June 2016. The authors adopted an inductive approach to framing analysis in which frames arise from the research corpus itself and are agreed by the coders working closely together.⁵⁷ To identify the various frames constructed and disseminated by the Israeli MFA, they grouped all tweets into three-day clusters based on when they were published. They grouped tweets into small clusters given their hypothesis that the MFA would continuously disseminate new frames given a need to react to unfolding events. They then analysed all tweets published over these three-day periods and identified the frames employed by the MFA. Frames were defined as consisting of the four elements identified by Entman⁵⁸ and were operationalised by categorising tweets into those identifying: 1) the

⁵⁶ Collins, DeWitt and LeFebvre 2019; Bjola 2018; Kampf, Manor and Segev 2015.

⁵⁷ De Vreese 2005.

⁵⁸ Entman 1993.

root problem that led to a violent altercation between Israel and Hamas; 2) the cause of the altercation; 3) a possible moral evaluation; 4) a suggested solution. Once the authors detected a change in one of the frame's dimensions (i.e., a new suggested remedy or problem definition), a new frame was defined and all subsequent tweets were analysed based on this definition. Disputed tweets were not coded.

To examine the MFA's real-time framing of the Gaza War, the authors categorised all tweets into thematic categories. This analysis followed Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun's method of thematic analysis as a way of identifying, analysing and reporting on patterns, or themes, within a given data corpus.⁵⁹ During their analysis, the authors formulated several thematic subject matter categories. For instance, a large number of tweets focused on Hamas' use of Palestinians as human shields. Subsequently they created a category named 'human shields'. Similarly, MFA tweets equated Hamas with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and depicted the battle against Hamas as a shared struggle by all democracies — they therefore created a category of 'shared threat of terror'. Finally, Israeli MFA tweets also highlighted Israel's right to defend itself, leading to the creation of the 'right to defend Israel' category. In total they identified 15 thematic categories (see Appendix 2)⁶⁰ into which they then jointly categorised all 792 tweets. Finally, they segmented the Gaza War into five periods and examined the prevalence of subject matter categories in each period. This enabled them to examine whether the MFA's framing of the war changed as events unfolded on the ground.

To test the second research hypothesis, the authors first analysed the percentage of Israeli MFA tweets that included only text, text and videos, and text and still images (including photographs, infographics and cartoons). Next, they measured the number of favourites, retweets and comments garnered by each of the 792 tweets. Then, they examined whether tweets containing visual media obtained higher levels of user engagement — be it in the form of favourites, retweets or comments. For each type of engagement (i.e., retweets, favourites, comments), the level of engagement was compared across the three types of tweets (text, video, still image) using an ANOVA test. They also examined linear increases in the level of engagement by type of tweet.

To examine the MFA's legitimisation claims in response to the third hypothesis, the authors once again examined their fifteen thematic subject matter categories. Given that framing rests on selection and emphasis, they attempted to identify prevalent categories used by the Israeli MFA to distinguish Israel from

59 Clarke and Braun 2014.

60 Both Appendixes 1 and 2 can be accessed online at [10.6084/m9.figshare.9735197](https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.9735197).

Hamas in terms of actions, norms and values. Such contrasts, or dichotomies, demonstrate how an MFA may seek to claim legitimacy for their own actions while delegitimising those of an adversary.

6 Framing Israel

The authors' framing analysis found that the Israeli MFA disseminated fourteen different frames throughout the Gaza War (see Appendix 1).⁶¹ The first frame (29 June–6 July 2014) dealt with the kidnapping of three Israeli teens by Hamas. Here, the cause of the problem was framed as Hamas' devotion to conducting terrorist activities against Israelis while the moral evaluation stated that every child has the right to arrive home safely.

The second frame (7–12 July) introduced a new problem — Hamas firing rockets at Israeli cities. The cause of the problem was Hamas' intention to destroy Israel. The moral evaluation in the frame depicted Hamas as an extension of ISIS and Boko Haram. Through this moral evaluation, Israel equated its war on Hamas with a broader global struggle against radical Islam legitimising Israel's use of force against Hamas. This frame demonstrates how diplomatic actors seek to claim legitimacy for their chosen policies.

The third frame, which lasted for three days, highlighted Israel's acceptance of an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire that was rejected by Hamas. The problem definition argued that Hamas was committing 'double war crimes' by firing rockets at Israeli cities from within populated Palestinian areas. The moral evaluation focused on Israeli attempts to minimise loss of life. On 17 July, the Israeli MFA disseminated a new frame meant to legitimise Israel's next military initiative — a full-scale invasion of the Gaza Strip. This was achieved by portraying Hamas as a powerful military force and emphasising its offensive capabilities such as infiltrating Israel via underground tunnels. The Israeli MFA also noted that as opposed to Israel, Hamas had rejected all ceasefire initiatives leaving Israel no option but to invade Gaza.

Between 18–19 July, the MFA continued to focus on Hamas' offensive capabilities as it 'fires rockets from above and digs tunnels from below', thus legitimising Israel's ground invasion. The Israeli MFA now also introduced a new causal explanation to the crisis — Hamas' objective of destroying the 'state of Israel & the Jewish people'. The invocation of the Jewish people suggests that the MFA was attempting to communicate with diverse audiences including the Jewish Diaspora. After this, during 20–22 July, Israel found itself on the

61 Both Appendixes 1 and 2 can be accessed online at [10.6084/m9.figshare.9735197](https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.9735197).

defensive given increased media attention to the high death toll of civilians in Gaza caused by Israeli aerial bombardments.⁶² In response, the MFA created a new frame. While the MFA acknowledged that the problem was loss of life, the cause of the problem was Hamas' use of civilians as human shields. The solution was twofold: the opening of humanitarian windows and the construction of a field hospital near the Gaza border. This frame demonstrates that framing is also a reactive process in which MFAS must contend with media depictions of events.

On 13 July, the Israeli MFA created a one-day frame responding to attacks on Israel at a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council. This was soon replaced with a proactive frame calling for the demilitarisation of the Gaza Strip and the appointment of a new government that would care for citizens and build schools rather than tunnels. The call to demilitarise Gaza was evident in all frames up to 5 August when Israel advocated that Arab states and foreign nations should help in 'saving Gaza' from the hands of Hamas.

Between 6-7 July, the MFA again framed Hamas as the extension of ISIS and Israel at the forefront of a global war on terror. The last three frames crafted by the MFA, lasting from 8-27 August, all dealt with various ceasefire initiatives. During this period, Israel repeatedly distinguished itself from Hamas through the terminology of 'we cease, they fire'.

The authors' framing analysis demonstrates that the Israeli MFA is mediatized as it reveals that the MFA crafted and disseminated fourteen different frames during the conflict — all in an attempt to create a prism through which the crisis could be understood by social media audiences. Moreover, the MFA published more than 700 tweets that were disseminated directly to these online audiences, thus competing with the framing of other actors. While the average frame lasted for 4.3 days, frames disseminated during the escalation stage of the crisis (the ground invasion of Gaza) were much shorter, averaging 2.1 days. Conversely, frames disseminated before and after the invasion lasted for an average of 6.0 days. These results indicate that, during conflicts, there is a need to continuously disseminate new frames given rapidly changing events and the need to respond to the framing of other actors, be it the media or diplomatic actors (e.g., the UN).

The results of this analysis offer three insights into the mediatization of MFAS. First, they demonstrate that framing is a proactive and a reactive process as MFAS must compete with and respond to the framing of other actors. Here, the mediatization of MFAS is driven forward by MFAS themselves and

62 Beaumont, Sherwood and Black 2014.

their competition with other mediatised actors in a complex media ecology.⁶³ Second, during conflicts, MFAs are forced to continuously create new frames as events outpace one another. Third, moral claims played a key role in the MFA's framing as they legitimised Israel's use of force while framing Hamas' use of force as morally illegitimate.

To further examine the Israeli MFA's real-time framing of the Gaza War, the authors segmented the war into five periods: the kidnapping of the Israeli teens, Hamas' firing of rockets and using tunnels to infiltrate Israel, the high death toll in Gaza, Israel's call to establish a new government in Gaza, and the final ceasefire negotiations. Next, they analysed which of the fifteen subject matter categories, identified in the thematic analysis (see Appendix 2), were most prevalent throughout the entire Gaza War. They identified the ten most prevalent categories, and gave them ranks from 10 (most prevalent) to 1 (least prevalent). Finally, they ranked the ten most prevalent categories in each of the five time periods. Only categories that were prevalent during the overall period of the Gaza War were ranked. For ties, mid-ranks were used. This process enabled the authors to assess changes in category prevalence over time and in so doing to examine whether the MFA's framing of events and actors changed from one stage of the war to the other. The results of this analysis may be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 offers several insights. During the first time period, only two of the ten most prevalent categories were ranked. This is not surprising as this period did not yet see a military altercation between Israel and Hamas. However, during the second time period (tunnels and rockets), nine of the ten most prevalent categories were ranked given the eruption of violence between the two sides. Thus, as the reality of the crisis evolved so did the MFA's framing, which now focused on contrasting Hamas' evil nature (rank 10), and rocket fire (rank 9), with Israel's right to defend itself (rank 8).

Yet as Israel drew media criticism due to the high death toll (period 3), the MFA's framing changed yet again. Indeed, during the third time period, the MFA focused less on military operations (category ranking changed from 5 to 4) and more on demonstrating Israel's attempt to minimise loss of life (category ranking changed from 4 to 6). Thus, the MFA responded to the framing of media outlets.

During the fourth time period (new government), the MFA took a proactive approach by calling for a new government in Gaza. This was manifest in the MFA's renewed focus on Hamas' use of human shields (category ranking changed from 3.0 to 5.5). Thus, as Israel's policy objectives changed, so did

63 Chadwick 2017.

TABLE 1 Ranks of subject matter categories by time period

Category	Overall period of Gaza War	Period 1 (kidnapping of Israeli teens)	Period 2 (tunnels and rockets)	Period 3 (high death toll)	Period 4 (new government, endangering Gazans)	Period 5 (ceasefire)
Evil character of Hamas	10.0	6.5	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0
Rockets at civilians	9.0		9.0	8.5	7.0	9.0
Right to defend Israel	8.0		8.0	8.5	9.0	6.0
Good Israel	7.0	2.0	7.0	7.0	8.0	7.5
Blame Hamas	6.0		6.0	5.0	5.5	7.5
Hamas human shields	5.0		3.0	3.0	5.5	3.0
Military operations	4.0		5.0	4.0	3.5	
Invoking morality	3.0		4.0	6.0	0.5	
International support	2.0		2.0	1.0	2.0	2.0
Ceasefire	1.0				0.5	4.5

the MFA’s framing of events and actors. Notably, the ceasefire category’s rank rose substantially during the last time period (category rank changed from 0.5 to 4.5) due to intense negotiations alongside Israel’s blaming of Hamas for consistently rejecting ceasefire proposals (category rank changed from 5.5 to 7.5).

Whilst focused on the evolution of Israeli frames, Table 1 also demonstrates changes in how MFAS are mediated. Studies from the 1990s suggest that diplomats used specific frames to ensure media support for their policies. During the onset of a crisis, diplomats would frame an event as a crisis to rally media support. During the de-escalation stage, diplomats would frame

their achievements to retain media support.⁶⁴ Yet Table 1 illustrates that MFAS now operate in a minute-by-minute news cycle as they constantly respond to events unfolding on the ground (e.g., Hamas' use of tunnels), negate media frames (e.g., high death toll in Gaza) and emphasise different facets of a nation's policies (e.g., new government in Gaza).

6.1 *Using Visual Media to Engage with Audiences*

To understand how audiences engage with the mediatisation of MFAS, the authors conducted a quantitative analysis of audience engagement with the Israeli MFA tweets. This analysis addressed their second research hypothesis and involved analysing the number of favourites, retweets and comments garnered by three types of tweets published by the Israeli MFA: text-based tweets that included no visual media; video-based tweets that included text and videos; and image-based tweets that included text and still images such as photographs, infographics and cartoons. Of the 792 tweets analysed in this study, 69 per cent ($n = 550$) were text based, 15.5% ($n = 121$) were video based and 15.5 per cent ($n = 121$) were image based. Table 2 includes a summary of the audience engagement types garnered by each type of tweet.

For each type of engagement (favourites, retweets, comments), there was a significant difference between the level of engagement according to the type of tweet (text, video, image). Image-based tweets attracted the highest levels of engagement followed by video-based tweets while text-based tweets attracted the lowest levels of engagement. Furthermore, the authors detected a significant linear increase in the level of engagement by the type of tweet. For comments, the linear increase was only borderline significant ($p = 0.06$). The distribution of types of engagement was somewhat skewed to the right. Therefore, they repeated the analysis with a non-parametric test (Kruskal-Wallis Test), which yielded similar results.

Results demonstrate that the Israeli MFA incorporated large volumes of images and videos into its Twitter activity. Indeed 31 per cent ($n = 242$) of all Israeli MFA tweets published during the Gaza War included either videos or still images. The authors contend that this is an especially high percentage given the fact that these visual media were not part of a pre-scheduled public diplomacy campaign. Rather, the MFA produced these visual media as the war in Gaza progressed and tailored these images to unfolding events.

Additionally, the authors' statistical analysis demonstrates that the use of visual media drove audience engagement rates with image-based tweets

64 Bloch-Elkon 2007; Auerbach and Bloch-Elkon 2005; Entman 2004.

TABLE 2 Engagement by type of tweet — means (standard deviation)

Type	Type of tweet		
	Text based (<i>n</i> = 550)	Video based (<i>n</i> = 121)	Image based (<i>n</i> = 121)
Favourites *, ^b	15.9, +12.17	18.55, +12.72	20.9, +16.42
Retweets *, ^b	46.19, +29.88	56.38, +33.61	63.26, +48.00
Comments *, ^a	9.40, +9.45	11.50, +16.52	15.34, +11.11

Notes: * ANOVA *F*-test significant, *p* < 0.001.

a Test for linear trend, *p* = 0.06.

b Test for linear trend, *p* < 0.05.

attracting the highest levels of favourites, retweets and comments, followed by video-based tweets. These results validated their second research hypothesis. Notably, the most common form of engagement with Israeli MFA tweets was retweeting. This is important as retweets may help the MFA increase the reach of its frames and the diversity of audiences that it interacts with. The results also demonstrate that image-based tweets attract more engagement than video-based ones. The authors postulate that this stems from the fact that videos demand a greater allocation of time to view, and greater levels of interest, as opposed to still images.

In summary, the results demonstrate that the Israeli MFA is a mediatised actor able to craft and disseminate diverse forms of multimedia content in real time and, by so doing, drive audience engagement with its frames. Higher levels of engagement may also lead to influence as social media audiences invest time and effort in interacting with the MFA’s visual content.

6.2 Claiming Legitimacy

To test their third research hypothesis, the authors analysed the prevalence of all fifteen subject matter categories identified in the thematic analysis (see Appendix 2). The results of this analysis may be seen in Figure 1 below.

The results in Figure 1 demonstrate that, during the Gaza War, the Israeli MFA attempted to create three dichotomies to claim legitimacy for Israel’s use of force. The first was a moral dichotomy that contrasted ‘evil Hamas’ (the most prevalent category) with ‘good Israel’ (fourth most prevalent category). The Israeli MFA emphasised Hamas’ evil nature by associating it with radical

FIGURE 1 Subject matter category prevalence (percentage)
Note: Overall percentage is more than 100 per cent as some tweets were classified into more than one category.

Islamic terrorist groups such as ISIS, arguing that it places Gazans in danger and stating that Hamas allocates resources to terrorist infrastructure rather than civilian aid. By contrast, the MFA depicted Israel as a good, righteous actor highlighting attempts by the Israel Defense Forces to minimise loss of life by distributing flyers before aerial bombardments, Israel’s opening of a field hospital near the Gaza Strip and Israel’s acceptance of all UN-mediated humanitarian windows.

The second dichotomy was between ‘the right to defend Israel’ (third most prevalent category) and ‘Hamas human shields’ (sixth most prevalent category). Here, the MFA portrayed Israel as a nation looking to shield its citizens from rockets while Hamas cynically uses Gazans as human shields. Importantly, the MFA used several arguments to demonstrate Hamas’ disregard for the lives of its citizens, including Hamas’ demands that Gazans stay on the rooftops of buildings targeted by the Israel Defense Forces and Hamas’ firing on Israeli aid convoys headed for the Gaza Strip.

The third and final dichotomy contrasted Hamas’ continued rocket firing at Israel (the second most prevalent category) with Israel’s continuous acceptance of all ceasefire initiatives (the tenth most prevalent category). Thus,

Israel demonstrated its adherence with the norms and values of the international community as well as Hamas' refusal to adhere to these norms.

These three dichotomies were all crafted by the MFA so as to create an environment in which Israel could pursue its chosen policy — the use of military force. This was achieved by legitimising Israel's actions and delegitimising those of Hamas. The first dichotomy focused on moral arguments as morality breeds legitimacy in diplomacy. Indeed, if social media audiences came to regard Hamas as the extension of ISIS, and Israel as yet another liberal democracy facing the threat of terror, they may have been more willing to accept Israel's bombardment of Gaza. Similarly, if media attention focused on Hamas' use of human shields, and Israel's right to shield its citizens, Israel could continue its military operation. Finally, if diplomats had taken note of Israel's willingness to accept ceasefire proposals opposite Hamas' refusal to do so, they may have placed pressure on Hamas to end the conflict in terms that were favourable to Israel.

In Israel and Palestine, psychological barriers and dichotomous ways of thinking serve to perpetuate an intractable conflict⁶⁵ and 'serve particular political justifications and contribute to perpetuating the cycle of violence and conflict'.⁶⁶ As such, this suggests that the MFA's use of social media is not just an activity that compliments traditional practices of diplomacy but rather that it is a practice that is used by MFAS and diplomats to obtain foreign policy goals. Subsequently, this validates the authors' fourth research hypothesis that the Israeli MFA will seek to legitimise their actions while delegitimising those of their adversaries.

The authors further contend that the Israeli MFA used dichotomies to win over the support of domestic and foreign populations. Through dichotomies, the MFA simplified the events taking place in Gaza as a 'good Israel' was waging a just war on a powerful and 'evil Hamas'. Moreover, by arguing that Hamas brutalised its civilians and indoctrinated children, the MFA's framing resonated with that of Western media narrations of ISIS. This may have increased the potency of the MFA's frames as they resonated with the pre-existing world views of social media audiences. Finally, by negating Hamas' immorality with Israel's 'moral warfare', the MFA attempted to rally Israeli support for the government's policies, including the acceptance of ceasefire initiatives. The results suggest that MFAS no longer only claim legitimacy through interactions with elite media actors but rather they attempt to gain legitimacy directly from the online public.

65 Siniver 2012; Manor and Crilley 2018.

66 Head 2016, 113.

7 Conclusion

Following the emergence of web 2.0 applications, MFAS found themselves operating in an increasingly complex media ecology in which they were confronted with new platforms, new actors, new practices and new methods for attracting audiences. This media ecology disrupted traditional ways in which MFAS could narrate their nations' policies, frame their actions and communicate these frames to global audiences. Consequently, MFAS around the world migrated en masse to social media sites. This migration led to an evolution in MFAS' mediatisation.⁶⁷ This article contributes an empirical study of mediatisation through a case study of the 2014 Gaza War to demonstrate how MFAS have internalised the logic of online media actors into their daily activities.

The results of this framing analysis demonstrate that the Israeli MFA has adopted the logic of new media actors. First, the MFA crafted and disseminated a series of fourteen frames meant to offer social media audiences a prism through which they could understand the events unfolding in Gaza as well as the nature and actions of the various actors involved. Second, the MFA framed events in near real time. Thus, like real-time journalism, the Israeli MFA practiced real-time diplomacy. Third, the statistical analysis revealed that the Israeli MFA continuously produced large quantities of multimedia and disseminated this media directly to online audiences. The MFA was thus able to drive audience engagement and increase exposure to its frames while diversifying the audiences it could reach.

The authors decided to investigate the mediatisation of MFAS through the case study of a crisis given the assumption that crises witness increased framing activity as MFAS must rally support for chosen policies, justify the use of force and create a receptive environment for a nation's policy goals. Numerous studies have found that MFAS now use social media to disseminate and evaluate frames in near real time. Indeed, the migration of MFAS to social media was intrinsically linked to the need to continuously counter the online frames of terror groups.⁶⁸ Thus, this article validates the findings of previous works and extends their reach to times of crisis. However, this analysis also adds to this corpus by demonstrating the evolution of MFA mediatisation from a broadcast model, which emphasised interactions with traditional media actors and the use of different frames at different crisis stages, to a real-time framing model that emphasises direct interactions with diverse audiences in the hybrid media system.

67 Pamment 2014b.

68 Hallams 2010; Manor 2016; Manor and Crilley 2018; Bjola and Jiang 2015; Seib 2016.

This analysis of the overall prevalence of subject matter categories also demonstrates that the MFA used social media to create an environment in which Israel could obtain its policy goals and which also prevented Hamas from obtaining their goals. To do so, the MFA employed three dichotomies. The authors stipulate that these dichotomies were used to obtain legitimacy for Israel's actions, and especially for the use of force, directly from domestic and foreign social media users.

The Gaza War case study demonstrates that the mediatisation of diplomacy has led to the mediatisation of MFAS. Structurally, the Israeli digital diplomacy unit incorporated into its activity video artists who created visual content that drove audience engagement. Procedurally, the MFA monitored and rebuffed the framing of other actors, including media institutions and the UN. From a normative perspective, the MFA attempted to raise domestic and foreign support for Israel's chosen course of action. As digital technology continues to develop and shape global politics, it is imperative that studies of MFAS attempt to understand how mediatisation shapes MFAS and their actions, in times of peace and in times of conflict.

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Ilan Manor

is Digital Diplomacy Scholar at the University of Oxford. His research focuses on the use of social media during times of geopolitical crises. In 2015 he contributed to the volume *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* by examining the Selfie Diplomacy activities of the US State Department. His 2016 monograph *Are We There Yet: Have MFAs Realized the Potential of Digital Diplomacy?* was published by Brill, while his 2019 book *The Digitalization of Public Diplomacy* was published by Palgrave Macmillan. He has contributed to several scholarly journals, including *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, *Global Affairs*, *Global Policy*, *Media War and Conflict*, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, *Policy and Internet* and *The Cambridge Journal of International Affairs*.

Rhys Crilley

is a Research Associate in Global Media and Communication currently working on the 'Reframing Russia' project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Prior to this, he completed his PhD at the University of Birmingham and was appointed a Teaching Fellow at the University of Warwick. His expertise lies in the areas of political communication, global politics and security studies. He is currently working on a monograph titled 'Legitimizing War in the Digital Age.' He has published in the journals *International Affairs*, *Journalism*, *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, *Critical Studies on Security* and *Critical Military Studies*, as well as contributing several chapters in edited books.