

Media Power and Narrative Warfare: How Israel Shapes Global Perceptions

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Abstract- This paper, "Media Power and Narrative War", examines the role of constructing narratives and using media as an instrument to frame those narratives in recent times between nation-states and the way those frame constructions help produce an overall public perception of the conflicted countries while engaged with one another within the overall world. In a world where the media environment is becoming more connected, international relations are no longer just dependent on military actions but also about the way that states (through their governments) attempt to construct a narrative using media to provide a frame to define what is perceived and therefore determine how one will act upon that perception. Using the theoretical framework of strategic narratives provided by Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle, the study of how a state creates its own strategic narrative to distribute through the use of media to create global interpretations of a specific event, situation or group, was accomplished using Robert Entman's media framing theory, and Joseph Nye's soft power theory to provide an understanding of how nations create their own narrative and the various ways in which the use of communications, media, and public diplomacy will impact how the nation is perceived by others. In addition, the methodology being used is qualitative discursive analysis and comparative media analysis. The study employs Entman's media framing theory applied to specific coverage instances, and comparative media analysis across four major outlets: the BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera, and official Israeli government communication channels. The October 7 attacks and their aftermath serve as the primary empirical case study, supplemented by analysis of broader patterns of conflict coverage. Finally, the impact of digital media sources and the differences in how they impact one another in the manner mentioned above is another aspect considered within this study. The findings illustrate how the control of information and interpretation plays a significant role in international dialogue due to the importance of narrative warfare. Media institutions and digital communication platforms have switched from being passive observers to active participants in constructing, challenging, and legitimising narrative warfare. The research discusses the role of media power in the broader context of information warfare and strategic communication and thus adds to

the developing academic literature that focuses on how narratives affect international political relations.

Index Terms- Strategic Narratives, Media Framing, Narrative Warfare, Public Diplomacy, Information Politics, Israel–Palestine Conflict

I. INTRODUCTION

International conflicts today increasingly involve controlling and shaping narratives, not just military power. With the rise of global news networks, digital communication, and real-time information flow, geopolitical rivalry has changed into a contest of legitimacy and public opinion that happens at the same time as traditional conflict. Media power is now a vital tool used in international relationships by both states and non-state actors to shape conflicts and influence diplomatic decisions by creating frames and shaping global perceptions of conflict through the use of global media and their platforms.

Narratives serve as strategic tools in international relations, as illustrated by the example of Israel and Palestine. The different narratives of security, victimisation, resistance, and legitimacy surrounding the long-standing conflict have been narrated via the competing security, victimisation, resistance and legitimacy of international news media for decades. The narratives of the Israel–Palestinian conflict are not neutral reflections of what has happened but rather constructed through several political communication methods, including media framing and public diplomacy. Therefore, the global views of the Israel-Palestine conflict have been shaped by the material aspects of the conflict, as well as the narratives that have circulated through global media and digital platforms.

The events of October 7, 2023 — when Hamas launched its large-scale assault on Israeli territory,

killing over 1,200 Israeli civilians and soldiers and taking approximately 240 people into Gaza as hostages — and the subsequent Israeli military campaign in Gaza had produced a humanitarian crisis on an extensively documented scale. It is a notable episode of narrative warfare, in which the same events generated fundamentally different moral and political interpretations across different media environments, with significant consequences for international public opinion, diplomatic alignments, and the political sustainability of the military campaign itself.

The development of narrative war is a symptom of the overall changing nature of global politics as well as the changing dynamics of international relations scholars, who recognise that the fight for power and influence is gaining momentum not only in the military and territorial realms but also in the information and symbolic realms. The state utilises narrative warfare (strategic narrative) to justify policies, seeking to gain the support of an audience in the domestic domain, as well as to create an impression on an international audience. By selectively framing an event or series of events in a particular manner, an actor can develop a set of interpretations of a conflict or series of conflicts that meet their political objectives while also seeking to marginalise other competing interpretations of the same event.

Israel has put considerable resources into influencing how people think about the conflict through crafting both diplomatic messaging, media engagement, and outreach via modern technology, therefore creating a new narrative that will shape the way others view Israel and how they Israel will view its use of military force. Israel's use of narrative warfare can be clearly seen during times of military escalation, when many international news organizations are witnessing a rise in the number of reports (as a direct result of increased media coverage), while several other actors are simultaneously using narrative warfare to establish their own perception of legitimacy in the context of that same event. Aspects of Israel's narrative strategy, and how that strategy plays into how Israel presents their military actions in the international theatre, include framing military action

as self-defence, focusing on democratic values and identifying sources of security threats.

At the same time, in this digital age there is strong contestation over the narratives produced around social issues. Through the use of social media sites, independent journalists and activist networks, it is possible to produce and distribute alternative perspectives that challenge established or official narratives, contributing to the fragmented (and often confusing) information environment we experience today. As a result of the introduction of these alternative perspectives into the dialogue surrounding social issues, narrative warfare has begun to emerge and continues to evolve, with many different actors competing to influence the way in which global society interprets and understands the Israel/Palestine conflict on a global scale.

This dissertation examines how the media's power to shape and influence perceptions of global issues, combined with the use of strategic narratives, affects the way the Israel-Palestine conflict is perceived globally. Drawing from the existing literature on strategic narratives, media framing, and soft power, the study will examine how narratives are constructed, disseminated, and contested in a transnational media environment. In addition, through an examination of how political communication strategies interact with media representations of an event, this dissertation will seek to understand the role of narrative warfare in contemporary geopolitical conflict.

This project will examine the way political actors create their strategic narratives regarding the Israel/Palestine conflict. Specifically, three research questions will be addressed: (1) What are the mechanisms through which strategic narratives are developed by political actors engaged in the Israel/Palestine War? (2) How does the distribution and framing of those narratives occur through global media platforms? and (3) What impact will competing narratives have on the perception of the U.S. and other countries' policies toward the Israel/Palestine War and the respective peoples?

The research will use qualitative discourse analysis and comparative media analysis (CMA) to analyse

the construction of and participation in the narrative process through international media platforms. As part of the research, comparisons of media coverage, political communications, and digital communications strategies will be utilised to identify and analyse the implications of patterns of narrative framing on international perceptions and diplomatic communication regarding the Israel/Palestine conflict.

The research will contribute to the larger debates within International Relations surrounding the role of information, communication and perception in modern conflict. Given that information flows have a direct impact on influencing political legitimacy and shaping public opinion, understanding the dynamics of narrative warfare will be critical to analysing how nation-states convey power and contest for authority within the international system.

II. MEDIA POWER AND STRATEGIC NARRATIVES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

There has been growing interest from academics regarding how media and communication contribute to the formation of international relations and have an impact on how international relations are established.

Historically, academic perspectives of international relations have focused primarily on the tangible means of creating power, which include military and economic capabilities as the basis for being a global power. Modern academic views have expanded to include not only material means of power, but also the importance of how information and narratives create and establish power through their immaterial influence within the global community.

States project their power and their sense of legitimacy through media platforms, political communications systems, and technologies.

Strategic narratives serve as an effective framework to explain this change in how political power is created through the use of strategic communications. Strategic narratives are the deliberate creation of stories by political actors that shape how issues are

framed and understood by both internal and external audiences. These narratives produce a simplified moral and political framework through which individuals interpret complex and ambiguous political issues by framing political issues using concepts such as security, victimisation and justice.

Strategic narratives provide a powerful way for states to use political communications by creating a narrative that is well-formed, coherent and resonates with the established beliefs and values of their audience. By shaping their international perceptions of events through narrative, states are able to provide a rationale for their policies, gain support from their own population and influence the perceptions of foreign populations. As such, strategic narratives are not simply a description of the events but are tools of power to create and assert influence.

When examining international conflicts, narrative analysis usually focuses on questions of legitimacy and responsibility. Competing actors will try to create a narrative around themselves as victims, defenders, or moral agents while their adversaries are portrayed as aggressors or a threat. The media has an important role in providing amplification of these narratives as well as transmitting them to audiences.

The concept of soft power is a useful lens through which to understand international influence, communication, and the relationship between the two. States use soft power when they persuade others by appealing to their personal interests as opposed to forcing them to accept their will through coercive means. States draw on soft power resources from their culture, political values, and diplomatic communication.

Public diplomacy is one way that a country can utilise soft power. Rather than focusing on state-to-state communications (as is traditionally done in diplomacy), states use public diplomacy to speak directly with foreign publics by engaging through the media, executing cultural exchanges, and leveraging the latest digital communication technologies. By serving as a vehicle through which governments influence how international audiences view their country and how other countries' governments interact with them, public diplomacy builds

legitimacy for a given policy and strengthens relationships.

The media has also become an increasingly important space for soft power and strategic narratives to exist together in modern international relations. Governments are increasingly aware that achieving international legitimacy will depend, in part, on how they communicate and how other countries perceive their policies at the international level. For this reason, communication has become a core element within broader diplomatic and security policy.

The relationship between the power of the media, strategic narratives, and the soft power of states has reshaped the information landscape of contemporary conflicts. Media institutions and communication networks have evolved into active participants in shaping political perceptions rather than just being passive observers. Through the distribution of images, narratives and interpretations, media channels help to create global views of conflicts.

III. NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION AND MEDIA FRAMING

For many years, the Israel-Palestine dispute has continued to have disagreements on the stories and images that define the conflict. Both groups involved in this dispute have attempted to influence how the world views the conflict, aside from its military and political aspects. The stories presented to news organisations play a major part in forming impressions of legitimacy, who the victims are, and who is to blame, as well as what types of issues may form the basis for public opinion and diplomatic negotiations.

The Israeli Strategic Narrative

Israel's strategic narrative in the aftermath of October 7 was constructed with notable speed and coherence. Within hours of the attack, Israeli government officials, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, and political leaders had established the core elements of a narrative that they then communicated consistently through diplomatic channels, international media appearances, and social media. The problem definition at the heart of this narrative was clear:

Hamas, a designated terrorist organisation, had committed an act of mass terrorism against Israeli civilians. The comparison to September 11 was deployed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials in public statements on October 7 and in the days that followed.

The causal interpretation embedded in Israeli official communication attributed the attack entirely to Hamas's ideology and Iranian financial and material support. The structural context of the Gaza conflict: the seventeen-year blockade, the displacement of Palestinians, and the expansion of settlements in the West Bank, was systematically excluded from this frame.

Palestinian and Counter-Narratives

Palestinian Authority and Hamas communications offered competing narratives, though with significant differences in framing that reflected their divergent political positions. Hamas's communications framed October 7 as a military operation against an occupying power, adopting the language of legitimate resistance rather than terrorism. This framing gained little traction in Western media but resonated significantly in Arab and Global South media environments.

Human rights organisations, UN agencies, and independent journalists operating in Gaza contributed a third stream of narrative production that operated largely independently of both Israeli and Palestinian official communications. This stream of civilian casualty documentation, evidence of infrastructure destruction, and humanitarian data provided the foundation for an alternative frame that gained increasing media prominence as the scale of the Israeli military campaign became clear.

Social media platforms became the primary terrain on which these competing narratives contested for visibility and credibility. Footage of the October 7 attacks circulated widely and was amplified by Israeli officials and Western media. Subsequently, footage of Palestinian civilian casualties, the destruction of hospitals, and scenes of displacement circulated on a comparable scale, creating a visual counter-narrative that challenged the dominance of the security frame. Palestinian journalists operating in Gaza, many of

whom were themselves killed during the conflict, provided an unprecedented volume of documentation of the conflict from within.

These narratives are conveyed through a variety of means, including diplomatic statements, interviews with international media, and digital communications. Diplomats, government spokespersons and political leaders engage regularly with international media to illustrate Israel's perspective on developments related to the ongoing conflict.

Likewise, social media has increasingly become an important medium for the development and dissemination of these narratives. Governmental organisations, military spokespersons and political leaders utilise platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and other forms of digital media to communicate directly with audiences throughout the world. Social media provides the ability to respond quickly to events as they arise and enables states to use imagery, video, and messaging to enhance their narrative framework.

In the digital age, there has been increased competition for control of narratives regarding the conflict. The use of social media by activists, journalists, and civil society organisations has enabled these groups to disseminate alternative interpretations of the conflict and provide a voice to the vulnerable, often contradicting official accounts and highlighting issues of humanitarian concern. As a result, there is now a fragmented and dynamic information environment surrounding the conflict, with many stakeholders competing to develop the public's perceptions of the conflict.

Recent events in the region, such as the conflict between Israel and Iran and the role of various countries involved in the region, have led to an increase in narrative warfare. Competing interpretations of recent events will be shared via international media, creating a wider range of interpretations that can demonstrate the geopolitical rivalry and ideological differences among different countries. These changing circumstances will affect how the world views both the Israel–Palestine issue

and the concept of regional security, as well as the legitimacy of countries in the international arena.

IV. COMPARATIVE MEDIA ANALYSIS

Global perceptions of conflicts are often determined and influenced by how the mass media covers foreign events. In addition to producing strategic narratives via the political arena, the international transmission and interpretation of these narratives through mass media (global news corporations) is affected by how they cover these same events. The media (global news) does not merely transmit information through its reports; rather, the media actively frames the way that events are viewed through its media framing techniques through selection of emphasis, language use, visual image(s), and narrative structure. Therefore, depending on which media company is covering the same event, different media companies can present dramatically different perspectives of the same event and, therefore, the audiences will have different interpretations of what has occurred in terms of assignment of responsibility, legitimacy and humanitarian consequences.

The majority of the literature on media framing theory emphasises that by choosing to include or exclude certain aspects of reality and elevating their salience for the audience through a communication text, communication(s) can be used to provide a favourable orientation (viewpoint) or an unfavourable orientation for the problem or situation. Framing, therefore, provides examples of how a public problem is defined; its cause is diagnosed; a moral judgement is made, and solutions suggested. As such, the framing process for international conflicts has significant implications for global narratives.

The coverage of the Israel/Palestine conflict shows how media frames vary by region and organisational structure. International media such as the BBC and CNN frequently frame developments in the conflict according to the views of people in an area (views of government sources), military developments that affect the area, and the larger strategic implications for the area. The language and terminology used in this framing often emphasise official statements given by their government as well as the military's

involvement and the overall security and stability of other nations through diplomatic means.

When the Israeli military takes military action against those they believe are a threat to its security, it is usually in response to threats that a militant group has made against it. The headlines used in news articles regarding military operations usually emphasise the terms of national defence (Counterterrorism) and usually have to do with security and stability. Humanitarian impacts are referred to, but usually they are referred to with some sort of official statement that justifies the military response to the threat to their security.

On the other hand, media organisations, such as Al Jazeera, usually emphasise the humanitarian consequences of military operations and emphasise the impact of military operations on civilians in housing areas in the conflict area. They usually will focus on the civilian casualties, dislocated peoples, and humanitarian crises resulting from military operations. The framing that these organisations would use to portray the conflict usually involves a larger picture of occupation, violation of human rights, and human rights and humanitarian laws.

The two diagrams illustrate the distinctions of how the various media outlets can produce contrasting interpretive frameworks with respect to audiences internationally. For example, Western media outlets tend to present security-political or geopolitical and diplomatic perspectives more strongly than regional media outlets, which concentrate on philanthropy or humanitarian issues and on local perspectives. The differences in their framing alone are not necessarily the result of any intentional lack of objectivity or bias, but are simply due to the institutional, geographical, and political context, regardless of whether they are large, small, or international media institutions.

Visual images also play an important role in how conflicts are framed for the general public. For instance, imagery of damaged or destroyed infrastructure, images of injured civilians, military, or war images can create an emotional response for the audience; therefore, it can heavily impact the audience's perception of the way the conflict is

reported. Researchers of visual politics have identified that visual images are powerful persuasion tools in creating the audience's perception of conflict by envisioning a particular aspect of the conflict while concealing other aspects. In tightly-coupled media-created conflicts, the visual aspects of these actions help bind a sense of collective identity around perceptions of violence, responsibility, and legitimacy of what is happening.

In contrast to pre-existing forms of media framing, the emergence of digital media also complicates the traditional forms of media framing. This multimedia environment currently exists as a result of the real-time distribution of images, video, audiovisual representations, and textual commentary provided by government entities, journalists, advocates, and ordinary citizens through social media channels. The massive increase in automatic and non-automatic content storage across a multitude of data networks has produced a fragmented information environment that creates multiple instances of competing narratives as opposed to a unified narrative, as opposed to how traditional media would have existed when reporting on these types of issues. Therefore, traditional news media organisations must now share the same media space with an unlimited number of digital agents who contribute to, challenge, enhance, or reinterpret state-sanctioned narratives.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to investigate how the power of the media and the use of narrative warfare are becoming more important in order to shape how people all around the world perceive different strategic conflicts at the geopolitical level. As of late, the battle over influence is increasingly moving beyond how a state uses military and economic means to exert influence on an opponent and is instead being waged in an arena that consists of the dissemination of information in the form of narratives, images, and media representations of political reality.

Through the use of the theoretical frameworks of strategic narrative, media framing, and soft power, this dissertation has explored how narratives regarding the Israel/Palestinian conflict are produced,

disseminated, and contested in global media. Additionally, this dissertation has demonstrated that narratives are much more than descriptive accounts of events; they are a political tool utilised by actors in the international system to influence the interpretation of events, legitimacy, and ultimately public opinion.

The comparative analysis of media coverage demonstrates the way in which various news organisations provide their audience with a different way of interpreting the Israel/Palestinian conflict. Where Western media outlets tend to emphasise the geopolitical and national security aspects of the conflict, regional media tend to focus their coverage on the humanitarian and social consequences. This difference in coverage has resulted in the establishment of multiple perceptions, which are often competing for recognition in the global arena, of the same events as reported by different news organisations.

The results of this study help to highlight the importance of understanding media dynamics in the field of international relations. With the increased speed of information flows and the global connectivity of digital communication networks, the ability to shape the narratives of an event(s) is one of the most important dimensions of the geopolitical influence exerted by any nation-state. As a result, government entities are using communications strategies as part of their overall foreign and domestic diplomatic and security policies because states recognise that global public perception can provide a substantial input for determining the legitimacy of a state and the outcome of its policy.

Moreover, the explosion of digital media has resulted in a fragmented information marketplace in which multiple competing narratives exist at the same time. This fragmented information environment causes it to be difficult for any one organisation or entity to dominate the narrative environment, and it also creates the potential for the spread of disinformation and polarisation between competing narratives.

This research indicates that narrative warfare is a major characteristic of 21st-century international political activity. The way we think about an event

influences our actions regarding that event. Therefore, understanding the interactions between digital media, political communication, and the dissemination of information can allow us to see how the media influences perceptions of conflict globally in the 21st century.

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