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Abstract

Antagonists' images in the international news media can play a significant role in determining their level of political success in the international arena, which explains why so many political actors invest considerable resources in public diplomacy. The goal of the present study is to explain the level of success that various actors (countries and non-state actors) have in promoting their preferred frames about terror to the international news media. Four types of explanatory variables are proposed, divided into context and focal event factors. Context factors include the political values and policy proximity between the country attacked (the victimized country) and a country whose news media have been targeted for influence (the target country), as well as the target country's experience in dealing with terror. Focal event factors refer to the nature of the trigger events that generate news coverage of terrorism. Apart from one exception (the policy proximity), all of the hypotheses were confirmed. The findings indicated that focal event factors have the most significant effect on the way foreign media covers conflicts and that, when it comes to coverage of terrorism, journalists are more interested in constructing a dramatic story than putting the events into a more general political context.

Keywords

Content analysis, foreign media, framing, public diplomacy, terrorism

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Scholars and professionals are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of public diplomacy in international relations; this has led many nations to invest heavily in promoting their messages to the international news media (Kunczik, 1997; Nye and Owens, 1996; Wang, 2006). The 'image war', in which opposing sides attempt to justify their ideas, beliefs, and actions, represents an important front in the comprehensive struggle between antagonists (Van Evera, 2006). This contest may be especially important for countries struggling with terror, since the fight against terrorism occurs to a large extent in the realm of communication, involving ideas, values, and perceptions (Archetti, 2010).

In this study, the term 'actors' refers to any country or non-state entity that is active internationally, while 'foreign press' refers to any news organization operating outside its own geographic territory. Actors engaged in conflict almost always attempt to promote their preferred frames to the international news media. The ability to transmit these frames to the foreign press is extremely significant, as information obtained through the media can influence how particular publics and governments perceive the events, especially in the case of foreign news with which the public has less knowledge and experience (Manheim, 1994; Sheaffer and Gabay, 2009; Wolfsfeld, 1997).

This present study's major goal is to understand the rules that determine success among various actors, countries, and non-state actors (NSAs) in promoting political perceptions about terror to the international news media.

Public diplomacy

Diplomacy refers to the communications system through which a country's representatives or allies defend their interests (Gilboa, 2000). The exposure to the media and the public has created a new diplomacy with new rules and powerful implications for diplomats, journalists, and the public (Pearce, 1995). *Public diplomacy* emphasizes communicating with people of other countries, thereby influencing a foreign government's policies (Malone, 1985). Political actors attribute great importance to their image in the international arena and to so-called 'soft power' (Nye, 2004).

Globalization and the media revolution have spurred countries' concern for their international image (Van Ham, 2001). A country's image can affect its relationships in the international community, especially when political actors are pursuing specific goals (Kunczik, 1997; Nye and Owens, 1996). This phenomenon is especially obvious in conflicts, as international support may well alter the outcome (Gilboa, 2000; Manheim, 1994). But interaction among states is not all that characterizes the context of contemporary international relations. Access to global communications has empowered a wide range of actors, including terror organizations. Instantaneous global communications at almost no cost gives NSAs the power to influence international politics (Betz, 2008; Douglas, 2007; Ross, 2002). This access to global communications could potentially allow actors to bypass traditional media and promote their messages directly to the public.

Public diplomacy can influence other countries, although not in the same manner or to the same extent. Each target country's culture and political environment greatly influence the ways in which that country reacts to events in other countries (Norris et al., 2003; Wolfsfeld, 1997). Messages with a matching cultural echo have greater potential

to be absorbed in the desired manner in a foreign country (Entman, 2003; Rhoads, 2009; Wolfsfeld, 1997); therefore, the greater the similarity of political values between the countries, the more likely the promoting country's messages will be successful.

Framing and the construction of media frames

Media frames are one way to understand how the media explain events and organize reports. A media frame is an 'interpretive package' that prioritizes a certain explanation or significance of an event (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). Any occurrence may be presented in several different ways, and the media make a purposeful choice to emphasize certain elements of the reality and suppress others (Entman, 1995). To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, so as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993). Political actors also use frames to influence their supporters, detractors, and the general public (Entman, 2003; Gamson, 1992). A media campaign is considered successful when the event, issue, or political actor is framed in a way that perceptions and interpretations benefit one side in a conflict and/or detract from the other side (Entman, 2003).

Journalists construct frames that are both *culturally resonant* and *professionally useful* (Wolfsfeld, 1997). Actors who create frames that meet both of these criteria are in the best position to promote their messages to the news media, although constructing messages that resonate in both the actor's culture and the target culture is especially difficult.

Terrorism and the media

Academic, political, security, and journalistic sources use a variety of definitions for terror (Ganor, 1993). Schmid and Jongman (1988) identified four components that appear frequently among the more than 100 different definitions they examined: terror is a *violent struggle* that purposely utilizes or threatens to utilize *violence against civilians* to create *fear and anxiety* for the sake of *political goals*. These criteria defined terror in this study.

One obvious and important goal for most terrorists is to attract attention to their cause. Weimann (1999) referred to 'the theater of terror' to emphasize the use of drama in an almost-theatrical production, whose aim is not the immediate casualties but exposure on the world stage of mass media. Therefore, the battle for media coverage is an integral element of contemporary terror. Most terrorists are interested in media coverage; their activities are designed to promote their existence and their goals. Many terrorist organizations have come to understand the media's crucial role and to take media considerations into account when planning their activities. Some also employ a relatively sophisticated public relations system (Hermann, 1995; Weimann and Winn, 1994).

Terror has become a global threat, which elevates the value of media coverage on the topic. Information pertaining to terror organizations and their activities is newsworthy material of international importance (Liebes and Frosh, 2006), which alters the way

terrorists are covered. In the past, and certainly around the time of 9/11, terrorists received media attention only after violent events; today, the media regularly offer terrorists opportunities to be heard. Gradually, the terrorists themselves have become a legitimate media source, presenting their arguments and justifying their motives via the media (Liebes and Kampf, 2007).

Public diplomacy in the age of terrorism

Trends dominating the 21st century include globalization, information and communication technologies that shrink time and distance, and the rise of global NSAs (such as terror networks) that challenge state-driven policies and discourse on the subject (Snow and Taylor, 2009).

Since terror threatens a country's security, countries must promote a foreign policy that will enlist other countries' support to combat terrorist organizations. A country's projected image and its foreign policy are two parts of the same issue because public diplomacy is a strategic foreign policy tool that helps recruit allies in the struggle against terror. A country does not have complete control over how it is perceived in the world; nevertheless, its image is a partial result of the messages that that country conveys (Peterson, 2002; Sheafer and Shenhav, 2010). Alongside the military confrontation, the fight against terrorism is played in the realm of communication, and involves ideas, values, and perceptions (Archetti, 2010). Military power has a decisive role in a world in which countries must defend themselves, but soft power will continue to grow in importance in countries' management of multinational issues whose solutions require cooperation with other countries, such as the struggle against terror where military might alone is insufficient (Nye, 2003). We need to take into consideration that 'soft power' is complex; unlike the wider fungibility of military or economic power, soft power is often layered with multiple elements reinforcing each other for a cumulative effect. Furthermore, the time between the introduction of soft power to a particular situation and any measurable outcome is often long.

Theoretical framework

The creation of media frames is a negotiated process; the political actors involved in a conflict (both countries and NSAs) attempt to promote their messages to foreign media (since journalists serve as processors) and get their preferred frames presented while trying to influence public opinion. This study examines the factors that explain some actors' success, with the central arguments outlined in Figure 1.

We borrow Goodwin and Duranti's (1992) dichotomy between *focal event* and *context* in order to shed light on why some political actors are successful in promoting their preferred frames in the foreign press. A focal event implies that the event itself is in some sense more salient and noticeable than its context. The event stands out as the focus of attention. Goodwin and Duranti (1992) argued that the focal event cannot be properly interpreted without looking beyond the event itself to other phenomena, such as the event's cultural setting. The context refers to the societal and political environment that surrounds the event.

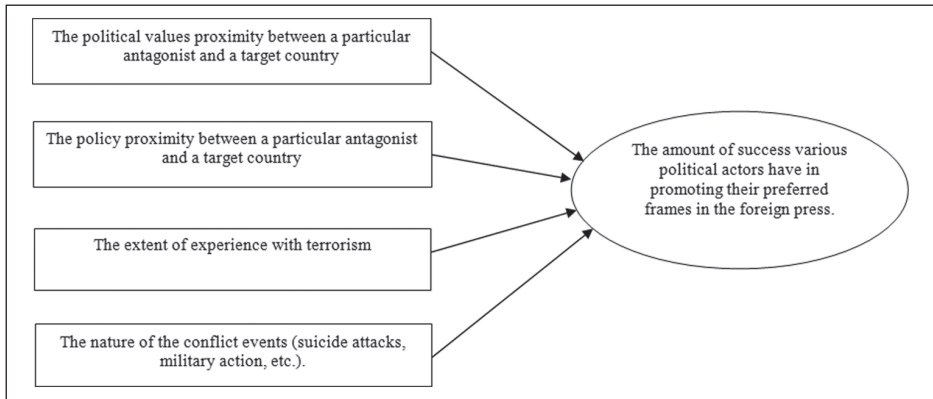


Figure 1. An explanation for success in promoting frames about terrorism.

For this study, context is the overall relationship between the target country and the antagonists engaged in the conflict (Sheafer et al., forthcoming), or particular experiences the target country has had in its recent past (terrorism of its own). The focal event has to do with the nature of the particular event whose meaning is being contested. The nature of the terrorist event, such as its level of intensity, has a direct influence on how a news story is constructed (Weimann and Winn, 1994).

An important question in covering terrorism is how much weight to give specific focal events or the more enduring political context. If context factors were more influential in the construction of news, we would expect most news stories about a specific conflict to resemble one another. On the other hand, if journalists give more weight to the nature or intensity of specific focal events, then political actors would have greater opportunities to influence news stories in target countries.

More details about each of these variables are provided below.

Context variables

The political values proximity between the victimized country in conflict and the target country. The proximity of political values between the victimized country and the target country (from which the media operate) influences how the conflict will be reported. Previous research indicates that success in transmitting messages and frames to foreign media depends upon the political and cultural similarities between the frame's conveyor and receiver. This is all quite logical; after all, we understand, accept, and prefer actors whose values are similar to ours (Entman, 2008; Sheafer and Gabay, 2009). This study investigates the similarity between countries in two areas: political values and policies.

Political values proximity is defined as the degree to which two nations are similar in aspects of their political values (Sheafer et al., forthcoming). Political values proximity represents a deciding factor in negotiating public diplomacy and in the choice of a media frame to describe events in the target media (Entman, 2008; Sheafer and Gabay, 2009). The target country's values affect the ability to successfully transmit messages through

the target media, since each country's political values and environments greatly influence reactions to occurrences in other countries and media coverage of those events (Norris et al., 2003; Wolfsfeld, 1997). Sheaffer et al. (forthcoming) found that a greater similarity in political values between two countries allowed one of the countries to be more successful in transmitting its messages to the target country. Similarly, this research investigated political values proximity between two countries in three dimensions: the individual (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010), state, and religion/civilization levels (Huntington, 1996). Examining these three aspects together provides broad, albeit incomplete, assessment of a country's political values. A target country will most likely absorb a frame originating in a country with shared values compared to one originating in a country with dissimilar values (Sheaffer et al., forthcoming).

Policy proximity is the level of similarity in two countries' policy decisions in the international arena (Sheaffer et al., forthcoming). Policy proximity can also be expected to assist in relaying and absorbing messages (Weimann, 1985; Wolfsfeld, 2004). In their study, Sheaffer et al. (forthcoming) found that greater political similarity between two nations resulted in greater success for one country to promote its message to the target country.

The target country's experience in dealing with terror. The political environment of a country influences the way its media relate to events in other countries. In target countries that also struggle with terror, media will be more likely to accept messages that are sympathetic to other victimized countries. Experiences in coping with terror will likely cause citizens and journalists alike to empathize and identify with the victims.

Focal event variables

The nature of conflict events. First and foremost, journalists attempt to tell a good story (Wolfsfeld, 2011). Therefore, the nature of events in a conflict is likely to affect media reporting significantly, as journalism routinely focuses on the specifics of an event to construct news stories. Journalists and other media professionals have developed criteria that define a good news story, including drama, conflict, innovation, and the unexpected (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980). Conflicts, violence, and terror correspond to the norms of the journalist's work, as there is nothing like a good conflict to glue people to the news. The media's intensive (some may say 'obsessive') involvement with drama is expressed in reporting terror events and war (Wolfsfeld, 2011). The force of events occurring within the conflict (number of victims, types of attacks, action taken by the victimized country, and so on) affects media coverage and the way news is framed (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). The more violent the terror event, the more likely the frame will be sympathetic to the victimized country (Weimann, 1985). In this study, the events were measured using three variables: whether the terror event was a suicide attack, the number of casualties, and whether the country responded to the terrorism militarily.¹

Factors that predict a victimized country's success in promoting its preferred frames to the foreign press served as the study's hypotheses:

H1: The greater the political values proximity between a particular antagonist (country or NSA) and a target country (where the media operates), the greater the success of that antagonist in promoting its preferred frames in the target media.

H2: The greater the policy proximity between a particular antagonist (country or NSA) and a target country, the greater the success of that antagonist in promoting its preferred frames in the target media.

H3: The more a target country suffers terrorism, the greater the success of the victimized country in promoting its preferred frames in the target media.

H4: The more violent the events in the victimized country (type of event and number of casualties), the greater the success of the victimized country in promoting its preferred frames in the target media.

Methodology

The study examined three conflicts: Al-Qaeda's use of terror against US targets (1993–2008); Palestinian terror against Israel (12 months during the second intifada, 2001–2006), and Islamic terror aimed at British targets (2003–2007).²

The project employed a multi-method approach, including both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of websites (to assess the antagonists' preferred frames) and a large sample of news stories about terrorist attacks published in various national newspapers. We conducted a qualitative analysis of the official publications and internet websites ($N = 521$)³ of the relevant political actors (countries dealing with terrorism and terror organizations) and identified the political actors' frames. Next, a quantitative content analysis was conducted on media coverage for a week ($N = 3,933$) after a terror attack occurred, in three countries other than the victim country.

The analysis of the actors' messages identified patterns in the way a political actor related to the conflict. A few major elements were examined: the actor's expressions and catch phrases; the way the actor defined the events and connected them to other events; the way the story's figures were portrayed and the victims described; attribution of guilt; and explanations and justifications for actions and events of the actor being analyzed. These elements were examined in every political actor's publications to identify themes and patterns in the messages. Generally, the actors' messages were consistent throughout the events studied, and can be divided into three frames: the problem, the cause, and the solution, according to Entman's (1993) definition of 'framing'. Put another way, all political actors tried to present themselves as victims, to place the blame on the other side, and to offer their solution to the conflict.

The stories appearing in the American, Indian, British, and Israeli press following terror events were examined based on the frames identified during the qualitative analysis, and compatible with Gamson's (1992) media frames measurement method. For every actor's frame, a list of possible messages was constructed and identified in articles dealing with the conflict. Thus, for every article, six frames were measured – problem, cause, and solution for the two sides of the conflict – using a coding sheet. By adding the results, we can measure the number of messages an actor was able to promote in each article – the higher the number of messages appearing in the articles, the greater the success in promoting that side of the conflict story.

Newspapers used in the analysis were *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* (both US); *The Guardian*, and *The Times* (UK); *Yediot Aharonot* and *Ha'aretz* (Israel), and *The Times of India* and *The Hindu* (India). Seven trained students conducted the content analysis of the media frames using a coding sheet. A reliability test based on a random sample of 359 articles showed high levels of agreement between the coders (Krippendorff's Alpha coefficient no lower than .764).

Actors' success in promoting their messages

The success of various political actors in promoting their preferred frames in the foreign press was the dependent variable in this study. To measure this variable, the *conflict coverage scale* (pro-victimized country, antiterrorist scale) was developed, in accordance with Robert Entman's (2003) approach to conflict frames: media coverage is considered successful when the event, topic, or political actor is framed in a way that supports the positions and commentary of one side in the conflict or that is detrimental to the other. The conflict coverage scale is gauged by measuring one side's success in promoting its messages as compared to the other side's success. Specifically, the number of pro-terror messages was subtracted from the number of pro-victimized messages that appear in the news story. When the conflict coverage scale was positive, the article supported the victimized country's position, while a negative number indicated support for the terror organizations' position.

In keeping with the theoretical model, four types of independent variables were examined.

Political values proximity

Target countries with similar political values to a victimized country were expected to present more messages supporting the victimized country's frames and fewer messages supporting the terror organization. According to Sheafer et al. (forthcoming), the proximity of political values between the target and victimized countries was measured on three levels, and the total distance between the two countries in all three levels determined the variable.

The individual values level: The values widely accepted by a nation's citizens reveal that nation's culture. The World Values Survey Project analyzes countries on the basis of two types of values: first – traditional values as opposed to secular values – rational; and second – survival in the face of self-expression (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010; Sheafer et al., forthcoming). For each set of countries (victimized country vs the target country), the Euclidean distance was calculated based on the country's average in both axes presented; the lower Euclidean distance indicated a smaller cultural difference between the two countries.

The state level: This variable, the country's common values at a national level, was based on data from the Freedom House analysis of political rights and civil liberties; the degree of democracy and civil freedom in the target country was measured and compared with that in the victimized country.

The religion/civilization level: This variable, which concerned the wider perception of a nation's groups, was based on Huntington's (1996) typology for categories of

civilization, depending mainly on the dominant religion. His typology of civilizations is highly criticized, particularly because of the author's highly debatable 'clash of civilizations' thesis. Yet our focus is not on the clash between the Muslim religious culture and the West, but rather on possible value differences among civilizations or religious cultures in general. The US, UK, and Israel, which are considered Western civilization nations, were coded as 1, and India was coded 0.

Policy proximity

Target countries with similar international policies to the victimized country were expected to present more media messages compatible with the victimized country's frames and fewer messages compatible with terror organizations' frames. The policy proximity variable was measured based on the degree of similarity in UN voting records of the target and victimized countries, in accordance with Sheaffer et al. (forthcoming). This evaluation is considered a good indicator of policy proximity because countries' positions on a wide range of political issues are examined. To compile voting records for 2000–2003, Erik Voeten's (2000) database was used, in which countries' votes in the UN General Assembly are coded as No (= -1), Abstain (= 0), and Yes (= 1). Next, the rank-order correlations (Spearman's rho) were calculated for victim country and target country, to assess the policy proximity between the two.

The target country's experience with terror

The conflict and terror coping strategies of the target country in which the media operate were also expected to affect the way the media relate to other terrorist conflicts. When the target country is a victim of terror, the target media was expected to choose frames sympathizing with other victims. This variable distinguished between times in which the target country copes with terror (= 1)⁴ and times in which the target country is free from terrorism (= 0).

The nature of the events in the conflict

Three variables were considered to assess the nature of the events in a conflict:

- (1) *Suicide attacks*. These types of attacks are more dramatic, may be perceived as more newsworthy than other attacks (Yarchi and Tsfati, 2009), and were expected to produce more media frames in support of a victimized country. Media articles in which suicide attacks appeared (= 1) were distinguished from those that reported other types of attacks or articles in which a specific attack was not portrayed (= 0).
- (ii) *The number of casualties*. Attacks with a high number of casualties were expected to be more newsworthy and to produce more frames in the media coverage congruent with victim countries' messages. Since most articles do not cite the number of people killed, the index presents the number of people killed in terror attacks in a specific conflict, during the month in which the article appears.⁵

- (iii) *Use of military force against terrorists.* A military attack by the victimized country (in contrast to other types of action) was expected to produce more media frames congruent with messages promoted by terrorist organizations. This variable distinguished between media reports in which the military action was portrayed (= 1) from reports of other types of responses or incidents in which the response was not discussed (= 0).

Results and discussion

In this section, each hypothesis is examined separately, followed by a multivariate analysis to better understand the combined impact of the independent variables on news coverage of terrorism.

Contextual predictors

The first hypothesis stated that the media in a country whose political values are similar to one of the sides in a conflict will frame the events to more closely align with the message promoted by that side.

A weak, positive, and significant correlation was found between the conflict coverage scale (the number of the victimized country's frames minus the number of the terror organization's frames) and the political values proximity between the victimized country and the target country ($r = 0.164$; $p < .001$).⁶ Therefore, when the two countries are similar in political values, the target country's press presents more frames promoting the messages of the victimized country and fewer messages of the terror organization.

The second hypothesis stated that the press in a target country with a similar policy to one of the sides in a conflict will frame the events to more closely align with the message promoted by that side.

Contrary to expectations, a very weak, negative, and significant correlation was found between the conflict coverage scale and the policy proximity between the victimized country and the target country ($r = -0.074$). However, the level of the correlation was too weak to allow conclusions about the correlation between variables. Previous studies indicated that the degree of policy proximity between countries does influence the promotion of messages for the victimized country involved in the conflict (Weimann, 1985; Wolfsfeld, 2004; Sheafer et al., forthcoming). The way in which the policy proximity variable was calculated may explain why the correlation was not found in this study. Unlike other variables, the degree of policy proximity was measured by only one dimension (UN voting record), and additional measures may be useful to examine this variable.

The third research hypothesis stated that during periods when the target country was victimized by terror, the target media was expected to frame other conflicts in a way that supports the message of the victimized country.

As shown in Table 1, the target country's experiences with terror activity had an impact on media coverage of other conflicts employing terror tactics. When the target country was coping with terror events, the target media framed other conflicts in a

Table 1. *t*-tests of the coverage scale variable by the level of terrorism experience and the events in the conflicts.

		N	Mean	Standard deviation	t value
The target country's experience in coping with terrorism	Times when the target country is coping with terror events	2592	2.28	3.24	-7.895***
	Times when the target country is not coping with terror events	1341	1.41	3.32	
Type of terror event	Suicide attack	2017	3.22	3.23	-26.067***
	Other types of attacks	1916	0.69	2.83	
Country's action	Military action	828	1.33	4.00	5.528***
	Non military action	3105	2.16	3.06	

*** $p < .001$.

manner closely resembling the message of the victimized country. This finding supports the view that the political context in which media operates must be examined to understand the role the media choose to play in reporting a certain topic (Wolfsfeld, 1997). Thus, in a political context in which the significance of coping with terror is understood, the media will display greater empathy for the victimized country.

Focal event predictors

The fourth research hypothesis stated that the nature of the conflict events was expected to influence the coverage and how it is framed in the target media. The more violent the events, the more likely the target media will frame the events to align with the victimized country's views. The nature of the events is determined by three variables: whether the event was a suicide attack, the number of casualties in the terror attack, and whether the victimized country responded with military action.

Regarding the type of attack, the differences presented in Table 1 were found to be significant; when the terror event is a suicide attack, the foreign press presented more messages framed to match the victimized country's frames and fewer of the terror organization's messages, in comparison to terror attacks that were not suicides. Dramatic terror events, especially suicide attacks, not only received more media attention than other terror events (Weimann and Winn, 1994; Yarchi and Tsfaty, 2009), but were framed to support the victimized country.

Regarding the number of casualties, a weak, positive, and significant correlation was found between the conflict coverage scale and the number of casualties in the terror attack ($r = 0.131$; $p < .001$). As casualties rose, the media presented more frames promoting the messages of the victimized country and fewer messages of the terror organization. Dramatic terror events with high casualties not only received much more media attention than other terror events (Weimann and Winn, 1994; Yarchi and Tsfaty, 2009), but were also framed to support the victimized country.

Table 2. Regression model for the conflict coverage scale.

Variables	B	SE B	β
Political values proximity	0.457	0.117	0.081***
Policy proximity	-1.520	0.163	-0.150***
Number of casualties	-0.001	0.000	-0.095***
Suicide attack (= 1)	3.001	0.104	0.455***
Military action (= 1)	-1.012	0.122	-0.125***
Target country's experience in coping with terrorism (= 1)	1.035	0.136	0.149***

*** $p < .001$, intersec $t = -0.597$, $N = 3932$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.210$.

Regarding the victimized country's response to terror, (military vs nonmilitary), the differences shown in Table 1 were significant: When the victim country took military action against terrorists, more media message frames were congruent with the terror organization's messages and fewer with the victimized country's messages. Thus, military action by the victimized country promotes the messages of the terror organization in the foreign media rather than that of the country victimized by the terror attack.

Upon examination of all the messages in the foreign media, the violence of the conflict events had an impact on news frames, as hypothesized. A more violent terror event (higher number of casualties, suicide attack) led the media framing to align more closely with the messages promoted by the victimized country. On the other hand, a military action from the victimized country had the opposite effect.

Next, the analysis adopted a multiple regression model to better understand the combined impact of the independent variables on news coverage of terrorism. The regression model also yielded a better understanding of the relative roles that context and focal event factors play in news construction (Table 2).

The model explained more than 20 percent of the variance in the way foreign media cover conflicts – the conflict coverage scale (positive values indicate support for the victimized country's message and negative values indicate support for the terror organization's messages). The regression equation was significant ($F_{(6,3925)} = 175.536$; $p < .001$) and results showed that all variables had a significant impact on the conflict coverage scale. The strongest predictor for the way in which the conflict was reported was whether a suicide attack was involved (which is considered a focal event factor), and this contributes to the appearance of frames promoting the victimized country's messages. Additional variables that increase appearance of frames promoting the victimized country's messages and decreasing frames supporting the terrorists' messages included the political values proximity and the target country's own experience with terror. The variables that increase the appearance of frames promoting the terror organization's messages and decrease of frames carrying the victimized country's messages include military action by the country dealing with terrorism, the number of casualties and the policy proximity between the target country and the victimized country. (The way casualties are measured – by the month or

by specific event – may explain these results. In addition, as mentioned, the relationship between the policy proximity and media coverage did not match the research expectation.)

Although the regression model allows an investigation of the comprehensive influence of the variables on foreign media coverage, the model included two levels of measurement: the article level (with variables connected to coverage of a specific event) and the target country level (with variables measured at the national level). Therefore, a SPSS MIXED model that takes into consideration the differential levels of the variables (multilevel) was used. The analysis was based on the coverage in the target country of each conflict ($N = 9$), and the findings of the hierarchical model were very similar to those in the regression model.

These findings confirmed that all of the independent variables, with the exception of policy proximity, explain the relative success of victimized countries to promote their frames internationally. The variables – political values proximity, suicide attacks, and the target country's experience in coping with terror – increase the appearance of messages that the victimized country promotes and decrease the messages the terrorist organizations promote. A military action by the victimized country moves the media further away from the victimized country's preferred frames. The only explanatory variable that was not found to be significant was policy proximity.

An examination of all predictors (using regression and hierarchical model analysis) showed that the events in the conflict (suicide attacks and military retaliation) have the most significant effect on foreign media coverage. A possible explanation could be that the nature of the event has more weight in how foreign media frame news stories than cultural assumptions. In other words, the greater the level of violence/victimization, then the less culturally ambiguous the events and the less leeway journalists have for interpretation. If confirmed in other studies, this finding has important implications for both researchers and policy makers.

Conclusions

This study's goal was to examine factors that explain the success various actors have in promoting political perceptions about terror to international news media. The nature of the events, the proximity of political values between the victimized country and the target country, and the target country's experience in coping with terror all explain the success of political actors in promoting their frames.

The distinction between context and focal event factors is important because it may provide insights as to how journalists construct media frames. The evidence suggests that the media place greater emphasis on focal event factors, which suggests opportunities for political actors seeking to transmit their messages through the target media. Actors could try to find themes that better resonate with the way journalists construct these stories. The emphasis should be on the brutality of the crime (telling the stories of the victims), since the journalists focus on the unique and dramatic aspects of the story. Even though the media usually use familiar frames to construct the news (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989) and report within a specific narrative (Roeh, 1989), events play the most significant role in coverage.

In addition, victimized countries' frames are given prominence, but terrorists still have opportunities to present their arguments in the foreign media. The effect events have on the process of news creation enables journalists to display the terror organizations' frames – which usually do not fit the Western society's cultural values – alongside the victimized countries' frames. In other words, when the news focuses on a terror event, journalists (as with other news stories) have an opportunity to present arguments of both sides.

Access to new media types empowers a wide range of actors, including NSAs. Future studies should examine how this access assists actors to bypass traditional media to promote their messages directly to the public.

Conflicts in the 21st century are characterized by a new warfare in which states fight against non-state actors such as militarized groups that are mainly terrorist organizations. In the information age, messages transmitted through the foreign media have a significant role in creating the actors that take part in the conflict and in shaping foreign countries' policies toward them. Therefore, managing public diplomacy in the age of terror has significant implications, and understanding how various political actors are successful in promoting their preferred message can help states manage their public diplomacy as a pivotal aspect of their struggle against terrorism.

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Notes

1. This variable examines if the country that is dealing with terrorism takes a military action as part of its fight against terrorism. The reason we did not use the term 'reprisal' is that this would suggest that the country's action is the direct result of a specific terror event or events, when in some cases countries' actions do not follow an attack by terror organizations.
2. Five series of attacks were examined in the Al-Qaeda–US conflict: February 1993 (NYC); August 1998 (the US embassies in Africa); October 2000 (the USS Cole); September 2001; September 2008 (the US embassies in Yemen). Three series of attacks were examined in the UK–Islamic terror groups conflict: November 2003 (British targets in Turkey); July 2005 (attacks in London); July 2007 (an attempt to attack Glasgow airport).
3. An analysis of the messages of the political actors as they appeared on their official websites was conducted: US ($n = 101$); UK ($n = 60$); Israel ($n = 114$); Al Qaida ($n = 75$); The Palestinian terror organizations: Hamas, Fatah, and Ezzedine al-Qassam ($n = 171$).
4. We used the information regarding suicide attacks on the soil of each country.
5. The data about the number of casualties was taken from the National Security Studies Center at the University of Haifa, Israel.
6. Since the terror organizations are NSAs, the political values proximity and the policy proximity between them and other countries cannot be measured.

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