

Public Diplomacy And Media Crisis Management: The Proposed Media Alliance

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Abstract:

This paper explores the relationship between public diplomacy, media crisis management, and how they intersect in today's interconnected world. The media plays a critical role in shaping public opinion and influencing a country's reputation, making it a crucial tool in public diplomacy efforts. Effective crisis communication strategies are essential in mitigating reputational risks during negative incidents, rectifying misinformation, and reassuring international audiences. The paper primarily draws from the book "Twitter Diplomacy: Media Polarization Before and After the Abraham Accords" to examine strategic trends related to media crises and polarization. It focuses on the Yemeni conflict, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the proposed media alliance including the challenges and opportunities for media cooperation among countries involved in the Abraham Accords, with a particular emphasis on the UAE and Israel. Promoting effective public diplomacy through citizen diplomacy, exchange visits, the arts, think tanks, and lobbying groups can help counter disinformation, bias, and polarization, and prevent media crises. Nevertheless, the complex regional conflicts present a significant challenge that demands sophisticated media strategies and crisis management measures.

Introduction

Public diplomacy and media crisis management share a close relationship as they both employ communication tactics to shape public opinion and mitigate reputational risks. Public diplomacy involves engaging with foreign audiences to advance a country's interests, values, and mutual understanding. This process can be facilitated through various means, such as cultural exchanges, educational programs, and outreach campaigns. The media serves as a critical platform in public diplomacy by disseminating messages to target audiences. Various media outlets, including television, radio, newspapers, and online platforms, can influence public perception of a country positively or negatively. Public diplomacy aims to cultivate favorable relations between countries, build trust and mutual understanding, and pursue shared objectives, with the media being a key factor in shaping public opinion and facilitating effective public diplomacy and reputation management efforts.¹

The media can also be used to address negative perceptions and manage crises that may damage a country's reputation. Employing effective strategies for crisis communication can help reduce the impact of negative incidents, rectify misinformation, and reassure international audiences. Managing media crises involves a deliberate approach to dealing with unfavorable media coverage or public backlash. In the event of a crisis, prompt and efficient responses from organizations and governments are crucial in minimizing reputational harm and safeguarding their interests. This may entail crafting a message that

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addresses stakeholder concerns, providing precise information and engaging with the media in a transparent and truthful manner.²

The significance of media monitoring, diplomatic exchange, and external media as essential tools of public diplomacy lies in their ability to advance a country's national interest, particularly in countering media crisis and its intentional efforts to undermine a nation's reputation. Although public diplomacy gained more prominence after the Cold War,³ it is a relatively new foreign policy strategy for the UAE. In 2014, the Public Diplomacy Office was established as an affiliate office of the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, and it became an independent entity under the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs and the Future in March 2016. The primary objective of the Public Diplomacy Office is to implement strategic local and regional initiatives that consolidate the UAE's soft power in partnership with the media, government, and private sector.⁴ Public diplomacy serves as more than just an auxiliary tool for enhancing a country's soft power and national image, as it can also bolster national security if applied under the concept of reputational security.⁵

In today's interconnected world, public diplomacy and media crisis management are more important than ever. Social media, as a new form of external media, has amplified the influence of public opinion on governments in various countries. Concurrently, public opinion is increasingly being formed and influenced itself by the false information and news that has proliferated on social media.⁶ As a result, governments and organizations must be proactive in their communication strategies, using a variety of channels and platforms to reach diverse audiences and build relationships of trust and understanding to prevent the crisis before it happens.⁷

This paper is discussing strategic trends related to media crises and polarization, which were primarily influenced by the research presented in the book "Twitter Diplomacy: Media Polarization Before and After the Abraham Accords." The book examined how Twitter diplomacy from 2015 to 2019 was used to manage media crises in the US and UK mainstream media, specifically regarding the UAE and Saudi Arabia.⁸ However, the paper acknowledges that since the book was written, changes have occurred in the political arena, impacting foreign policy in the region and globally, as well as the media landscape. Therefore, the paper will cover some of the topics discussed in the book but will also include up-to-date information.

The paper will focus on the Yemeni conflict and the Muslim Brotherhood, touching briefly on the topic of Jamal Khashoggi's support for the Brotherhood and his murder, which resulted in a media crisis in the Western world, and draws lessons from this. The main emphasis will be placed on mainstream media outlets in the United States and United Kingdom, as their communication is predominantly in English, allowing for a broad international audience. This implies that any partiality or turmoil in the US and UK media could potentially harm a country's reputation or lead to character assassination of an individual, given the wide reach and global distribution of these media outlets.

Given the book's conclusion that twitter diplomacy is insufficient in addressing media crises and polarization, the paper will prioritize discussing a specific element of public diplomacy - the proposed media alliance among the countries involved in the Abraham Accords, with a particular emphasis on the UAE and Israel. This initiative seeks to counter the biased and misleading narratives presented by the international mainstream media. This paper examines the opportunities for media cooperation among the UAE and Israel, including the need for clear policies on media exchange during times of conflict, the importance of citizen diplomacy, the potential of collaborative think tanks, and the role of lobbies in the United States. The challenges associated with this endeavor will also be a significant focus.

Media Crises and Polarization

The absence of a bipartisan consensus in the United Kingdom and, to a greater extent, in the United States regarding vital issues in the Middle East, such as the Yemen conflict and the Muslim Brotherhood, has widened the gap in the media's political leanings. Consequently, the right-leaning political factions and their corresponding media outlets espouse a particular stance, while the left-leaning ones and their media counterparts take another, thereby exacerbating tensions.⁹

According to the former President of Middle East Broadcast Networks (MBN), Alberto Fernandez, liberals in the West such as the Obama administration, found political Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood to be convenient antidotes to extremist groups like Da'esh and Al-Qaeda, because they viewed them as versions of moderate Islam that could tame terrorist groups. The act of fighting political Islamist groups is sometimes mistakenly linked to Islamophobia by liberal Westerners. On the other hand, conservative parties consider political Islamists to be a gateway to extremism, because they all belong to the same extremist ideology.¹⁰

This might explain why some Arab countries that oppose political Islam are allied to conservative parties, while advocates of political Islam are allied to liberal leftist parties. Since international broadcasting, mainly US and UK mainstream media, is dominated by the liberal left, they indirectly support political Islam, referring to those involved as "moderate Islamists" to distinguish them from extremist terrorist groups such as Da'esh and Al Qaeda.¹¹

There are, of course, other reasons for this polarization in Western media. There is no consensus among Arab countries, even among Arabian Gulf States, over the Muslim Brotherhood's support for political Islam. Kuwait and Oman have taken a more lenient approach towards the Muslim Brotherhood, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE have a more hardline stance against them.¹² Undoubtedly there is extensive polarization in international broadcasting, which perpetuates the bias in coverage by mainly American and British media. To fully explore this polarization and other media crises, here are some specific examples:

The Yemeni Conflict

During the war in Yemen, specifically from 2015 to 2019, CNN and BBC focused extensively on the humanitarian crisis, highlighting the civilian casualties and the severe impact of the blockade on food shortages. However, the media did not report on the Houthi group's use of civilians as human shields or their restriction on food aid deliveries in regions they controlled.¹³ Both CNN and the BBC ignored the importance of the security issue to the Saudi-led coalition and oversimplified the cause of the conflict as a proxy war between Shia Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia. Much of the media narrative around the conflict is therefore reduced to religious divisions and regional power plays. The problem is much more complicated than that, with a multitude of causes and concerns, but if one were to reduce it to a single issue it would not be a question of sect, but rather of security.¹⁴

This shows that the media should not be viewed only within the input stage of the communication process, but rather in the general output environment where foreign policy operates. Political communication in particular is based on the political arena of countries that is reflected in the media. Thus, the lack of bipartisan agreement in the American and British politics regarding the danger of political Islam is reflected in the media's failure to comprehend the danger of giving a voice to their advocates and armed non-state militias as Houthis.¹⁵

The media landscape is complex and multifaceted, and there are several factors that influence what stories are covered, how they are covered, and how much attention they receive. One of the key factors is editorial preferences, which refers to the beliefs, values, and priorities of the editors and journalists who determine what stories are newsworthy and how they are presented. This could clarify why the UAE's humanitarian aid in Yemen was not featured by the mainstream media. Most of the mainstream media organizations' editorial objectives were centered on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, primarily induced by the conflict, resulting in the overshadowing of the humanitarian aid initiatives.¹⁶

It should be noted that the media coverage of the Yemeni crisis has received criticism for its narrow focus and superficial analysis, both in Western and international contexts. The coverage tends to concentrate on the war's humanitarian consequences and civilian casualties, without delving deeper into the intricate political and ideological forces driving the conflict. Such oversimplification may lead to a lack of comprehension regarding the different actors and their motivations. This may be a result of divergent viewpoints across party lines in the United States and United Kingdom regarding the danger posed by political Islam. Consequently, the media may not fully grasp the risks associated with providing a platform to non-state militias.¹⁷

The Muslim Brotherhood

Since the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring, the Western media, particularly in the United States and United Kingdom, have provided sympathetic coverage of political Islam, giving a platform to its advocates, predominantly the Muslim Brotherhood. The body of media supporting the Muslim Brotherhood is vast, but is perhaps best illustrated by an article in *The Economist*, called "Islamists, elections and the Arab spring: And the winner is".¹⁸ The article found convenient antidotes to extremist groups like Al-Qaeda in political Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood: "As peaceful political Islam advances, Al-Qaeda and its violent jihadi friends have retreated to the remotest patches of Yemen, Somalia and the Sahara Desert." The article went further in its support, reading like a campaign pamphlet for the group:

The Brothers have repeatedly insisted that they will uphold the rights of women and religious minorities and respect the verdict of the polls, even if it goes against them. They say they will not enforce the veil or immediately ban alcohol. As in Tunisia and Morocco, they will seek to rule in coalition with secularists. As in Turkey, they want the generals who used to rule and persecute them to go back to their barracks. They will be keener to support the Palestinians than Hosni Mubarak was, but do not want to tear up the peace treaty with Israel.

The article gives the impression that the Muslim Brotherhood are truly liberal supporters of democracy, while in fact Da'esh and Al-Qaeda all derive their ideologies from the Muslim Brotherhood. The key, and most dangerous, difference is that the Muslim Brotherhood presents a tolerant, moderate, even liberal, version of themselves to the West and only their true radical selves to the Arab region.¹⁹

As a result of their extremism, Egyptians protested against the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood on June 30, 2013 and against President Mohammed Morsi a few days later. While the Western media and governments, especially the Obama administration, had provided extensive sympathetic coverage of, and political support for, the January 25 revolution against Hosni Mubarak in 2011, coverage and support during the ousting of Morsi was less enthusiastic. The media, especially CNN, consistently depicted the events primarily as a military coup, while the US government delayed some deliveries of military equipment to Egypt. CNN in particular gave significant airtime to the Obama administration's concerns over the future of democracy in the country and broadcast

television interviews with the Muslim Brotherhood, describing the events in Egypt as a military coup. The groundswell of support from the Egyptian people for the military, and the twenty-two million who protested against the Brotherhood's extremism and failed policies, was reduced to a footnote.²⁰

Strategic researcher Amr Ammar goes so far as to say CNN anchor, Christiane Amanpour, seemed nervous and tense as she showed pictures that supported the idea of a military coup. In fact, the main reason for her nervousness was that CNN had to change its position from standing against military rule in 2011 to supporting the Egyptian people's backing of the military coup to topple the Muslim Brotherhood regime in 2013. At that time, the Democrat Party and the liberal mainstream media, such as CNN, could not stand the idea of toppling an elected government even if keeping it meant the destruction of the Egyptian state and its identity. As a result, it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between CNN coverage of the June 30 revolution and that of the pro-Muslim Brotherhood channels – they all came across as advocates of political Islam. Mainstream media support for the Muslim Brotherhood did not stop after the failure of the so-called Arab Spring.²¹

Despite the events occurring in Egypt, their impact extends beyond the country to all Arab nations. The Muslim Brotherhood's reign in Egypt, where the group originated and expanded, and which has the largest population in the Arab world, inspired similar actions by Muslim Brotherhood factions in other Arab countries, including the UAE, during the Arab Spring in 2011. However, this turned out to be a misguided notion based on flawed assessments, the most significant of which stemmed from the portrayal of substantial Western media support for the Brotherhood.²² As a result, the media's actions are inadvertently creating a platform for the Muslim Brotherhood, which could pose a significant threat to the national security of various Arab countries.

Jamal Khashoggi

The case of Jamal Khashoggi's advocacy for the Muslim Brotherhood and his subsequent murder serves as a cautionary tale about the role of media in promoting political agendas and the dangers of political polarization. The lessons learned from this case include the need for media outlets to maintain ethical standards in their reporting, to be aware of potential conflicts of interest, and to avoid becoming pawns in political power struggles.

One key lesson from the Khashoggi's case is the importance of maintaining impartiality in journalism. While it is acceptable for journalists to express opinions and advocate for causes, they must also be careful to maintain a balanced perspective and avoid promoting a particular political agenda.²³ In Khashoggi's case, his ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and his previous work as a media advisor to the former director of Saudi intelligence and a former ambassador in London, and then in Washington suggest that his views may have been influenced by his political connections, and this should have been taken into account by media outlets reporting on his murder.²⁴

Another lesson is the need for transparency in media ownership and funding. The revelation that Khashoggi's columns in *The Washington Post* were shaped by a ghostwriter who was funded by a foundation raises questions about the ethical implications of this arrangement. While *The Washington Post* denied any knowledge of this arrangement, the fact that several journalists criticized the newspaper's ethics suggests that there was a lack of transparency and accountability in the editorial process.²⁵

Finally, the Khashoggi's case highlights the danger of political polarization and the role that media outlets can play in exacerbating this problem. The fact that Khashoggi's murder became such a major international news story reflects the polarized nature of global politics and the desire of various parties to use the story to advance their own agendas.

Addressing Media Crises and Polarization

There are five main ways to deal with media crises and polarization. First, by ignoring it. This keeps the discussion focused on the key message and helps prevent it escalating, but risks misconception by the public as it allows misleading statements to go unchallenged. Second, by debunking the lies. Diplomats, journalists, and the general public are encouraged to counter fake news in this way. Third, by turning the tables. The use of humor and sarcasm can be effective in further spreading the right message, avoiding an escalation in emotions and undermining the credibility of the source of the fake news. Fourth, by discrediting it. This is most effective when the messenger rather than the credibility of the message is undermined so that the public come to realize messages from a particular source cannot be trusted. Fifth, by disrupting it. This can be accomplished by targeting gatekeepers with the correct information about the issue at hand, and encouraging them not to inadvertently promote fake news and falsehoods.²⁶

The easiest way of dealing with media crises and polarization then is by ignoring it, but there is danger in ignoring incorrect news when it comes to foreign policy, especially when that news is being reported in a distant region. When biased or partial news regarding the Yemeni conflict or the Muslim Brotherhood is presented in the American and British mainstream media, the general public are unlikely to question it, because they are not fully aware of the matter. However, the same general public will not believe domestic fake news in the mainstream media, because they are much more aware of the subject.

The impact of the media depends on whether the issues covered are obstructive or not. Obstructive issues impact people's day-to-day lives and are directly experienced, including national issues that relate to the economy, immigration policies, health insurance, national security etc. Unobstructive issues are the ones encountered only in the news, such as foreign policy in the Middle East, the Muslim Brotherhood, and so on. Since the people are often unaware of issues like these, and certainly have no first-hand experience in them, the media becomes a powerful tool for influencing audiences on these issues. As a result, the American and British public are more easily manipulated by the mainstream media when it comes to foreign affairs in the Arab region than on American or British internal issues.²⁷

The UAE has taken measures to combat fake news by implementing strict laws against spreading false information and creating a government agency to monitor and counter fake news. However, there are still shortcomings in their approach as it primarily focuses on reactive measures such as debunking false information rather than proactive measures that address the root causes of fake news, particularly in matters related to national security threats like the Muslim Brotherhood. It is crucial for the UAE to convey accurate information about their involvement and motives in tackling national security threats to ensure transparency. This should not be limited to Western media but also extend to experts, academics, and the general public interested in Middle Eastern foreign policy. Organized lobbies that effectively communicate the UAE's message are necessary to achieve this. In order to comprehend the means by which this can be accomplished, it is crucial to examine the effectiveness of the UAE's lobbies in the United States.²⁸

The UAE's Lobbies in the United States

The UAE has a relatively positive image in Washington D.C. and is widely considered to be one of the most influential Arab states.²⁹ Unlike many Arab countries, the UAE does not have any major internal political challenges and the main threat to its national security is the Muslim Brotherhood. In 2015, it significantly ramped up lobbying efforts in an effort to have the White House designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization.³⁰ This came after the UAE put the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) and Muslim American Society (MAS), two Muslim American organizations with alleged ties

to Brotherhood, on their terrorist list in 2014. The move came just before the lobbying campaign in order to encourage other groups in the United States to lobby against the Muslim Brotherhood.³¹

In response, the Muslim Brotherhood mobilized a sympathetic grassroots base within the United States to aggressively lobby against the designation. A New Jersey-based grassroots organization called Egyptian Americans for Freedom and Justice (EAF AJ) made a tour of lawmakers on May 4, 2017, urging them not to support the designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization.³² The UAE is unlikely to succeed because designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization could cause problems between the US government and the American Muslim community. Also, powerful organizations such as CAIR, a large Muslim civil society organization with a significant grassroots base all over the United States, objected to the designation on the grounds that it was a crackdown on civil liberties and a barrier to democratic participation.³³ The main shortcoming of the UAE's lobbying is that although it is strategically timed, it focuses only on the political elite, without a grassroots base. UAE lobbying is focused primarily on trade deals and steers clear of controversial issues, unless they directly impact UAE national security, such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

The main controversial lobbying conducted by the UAE has therefore been the anti-Muslim Brotherhood lobbying. While its strategic, elite-level lobbying has been effective in positioning the UAE as a key US business and political partner in the Middle East, its lack of a grassroots base undermined efforts to have the Muslim Brotherhood designated as a terrorist group. The domestic American Muslim community's counter lobbying instead played a more effective role in blocking the resolution.³⁴

The lobbying of the UAE is held back by the fact that it revolves around specific issues and not an overall narrative. It hires lobbyists for specific issues when they arise. These lobbyists focus on relations with Congress members, think tanks and forums specific to certain issues. This gives the UAE significant clout in US political affairs relating to the region, but leaves it without the broad-based support. To improve its lobbying efforts, the UAE should focus on building relationships with American civil society organizations that share its views. By engaging with these organizations, the UAE can build a coalition of supporters that can help amplify its message and put pressure on lawmakers to support its position. This would require a significant investment of time and resources, but it could ultimately pay dividends in terms of achieving the UAE's lobbying goals.

The UAE's efforts to create a solid grassroots base among the Arab American community will be hamstrung by the divisive nature of the political issues within that community. There is no consensus on the issue of the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, among the Arab American community. A large part of the communities is sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood and are opposed to the ongoing conflict in Yemen. Nor there is consensus even among the Muslim community in the United States on the issue of the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁵ As a result, the UAE is disadvantaged in terms of lobbying compared to other countries that have established connections with grassroots organizations in the United States.

In the following sections, we will explore how media alliances between the countries involved in the Abraham Accords, especially the UAE and Israel, can effectively combat media crises and polarization. Moreover, we will investigate how these partnerships can reinforce lobbying endeavors and promote collaboration among these nations. However, equal attention will be devoted to the challenges inherent in this endeavor, particularly amidst periods of conflict.

The Abraham Accords and a Media Alliance

As a result of the Abraham Accords, now in their third year and half, diplomatic relations between the Gulf nations and Israel are at an all-time high. These relationships have led to bilateral cooperation in a number of key sectors, but also represent a chance to identify areas where more attention is needed – namely, the media.

When it comes to Abraham Accords countries, all involved must manage and counter disinformation, bias and polarization in overseas media coverage of their countries, while also reflecting on ways to foster mutual understanding amongst members. In Gulf countries, the media overwhelmingly focuses on human rights violations at the expense of other issues, while coverage of Israel is often an unnuanced portrayal of the country as a violent occupier. Likewise, coverage of the Abraham Accords itself has often been muted, downplaying cooperation between Arab Gulf countries. Abraham Accords countries need to establish avenues for media cooperation to share important stories, accurate information and generate nuanced coverage of success stories but also challenges.

Coordinating Media Cooperation During Conflict

Instances of more coordinated media cooperation already exist and their examples can be built upon. On April 7, 2021, Emirates News Agency and Tazpit Press Service signed a professional news exchange and cooperation agreement. Emirates News Agency has also launched a Hebrew-language website. However, the two agencies now need a clear policy on how to cooperate not only in times of stability but to exchange print, audio and video content in times of turmoil – especially during periods of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.³⁶

Silence during this period, as was the case during the 2021 conflict sparked by Sheikh Jarrah, allows radical and terrorist organizations to take advantage of the hostility to promote their ideologies. Scenes from these conflicts have a significant impact on the Arab public, including those from Abraham Accords signatory countries. Some members of the public in the UAE and Bahrain were deeply affected by the media scenes they saw from Gaza during the conflict in May 2021, impacting on their views of Israel.³⁷

It is therefore important to encourage exchanges of political analysts and journalists between Abraham Accords countries, including Israel, so that they appear in each other's media and help to provide context and alternative viewpoints – both sides of the conflict need to be explored throughout Arab, Israeli, and foreign media. Israeli strikes that caused death, injury and the destruction of buildings in Gaza should be depicted, and Hamas projectile missiles launched at Israel must also be shown.³⁸

Another challenge is that the Biden administration, according to most analysts from both Israel and Palestine, does not see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a priority because it is busy with other challenges such as the war in Ukraine. Also, according to analysts, the Biden administration is not enthusiastic about the Abraham Accords so confronting media crises will mostly fall to the Abraham Accords countries, especially during periods of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.³⁹ Also, despite recent signs of burgeoning interest, these efforts ultimately fell short due to a lack of strategic planning from the outset of the presidency. For example, since Benjamin Netanyahu won the elections in November 2022, his government has been described by the international mainstream media as the most right-wing government in the history of Israel. This rhetoric alone ignites fear and anxiety across the Arab world. The fear is further triggered by the demeanor and aggressive language used by certain right-wing government officials and ministers, exemplified by incidents such as Minister of National Security, Ben-Gvir's, storm through the Temple Mount courtyards in the first week of the new government, and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich's declaration that "the Palestinian people" do not exist.⁴⁰

Even though President Biden looks forward to working with Netanyahu's government, the White House has previously dodged questions over Netanyahu's right-wing politics, which are very different from the Biden administration's Center-Left Democratic Party. Consequently, Netanyahu's government will come under greater political scrutiny, as well as greater scrutiny in the mainstream media. Furthermore, Israeli leftists and opposition have escalated the complexity of the situation by globally amplifying the polarization of Netanyahu's government through media exposure, at times misrepresenting government officials' statements out of context and portraying them negatively.⁴¹

The Abraham Accords require a stable environment in order to thrive – participating countries cannot act recklessly but need to continue to invest in diplomatic relations. They no longer give Israel the cold shoulder in the absence of a solution for the Palestinians, and now accept that normalization of diplomatic relations is a prerequisite for peace and conflict resolution. The Abraham Accords countries have taken these agreements to a whole new level by going beyond formal, cold peace arrangements between governments, to warm peace that fosters people-to-people engagement. But if these countries discover that they are dealing with an irresponsible partner that does not respect their new, bolder diplomacy, this closeness will diminish over time. Even if tensions can be worked through or negotiated around by governments, it is difficult to convince the wider public that the Abraham Accords have benefited the region when the killing continues, especially since it is early days and many are still opposed to, and skeptical of the Abraham Accords.⁴²

The conflict in Gaza and the media depiction of violent events against civilian Palestinians have added further complexity to the situation. Within the UAE, this conflict has triggered a noticeable shift in focus, with widespread public support for the Palestinians and government criticism of Israel's actions in Gaza. This sentiment among the populace has impacted the UAE's stance, leading to a more restrained approach in its relations with Israel, including media collaborations.⁴³

While the UAE has condemned Hamas for the violence, it has also voiced apprehension regarding the regional repercussions and the humanitarian fallout of the conflict. This war has illuminated the intricacies within the UAE's public sentiment, revealing both strong backing for the Palestinian cause and a recognition of the broader geopolitical implications, compelling a delicate balancing act to safeguard national interests.⁴⁴

Given the intricate and highly sensitive nature of the conflict, a sophisticated media strategy and effective public diplomacy are essential for the countries involved in the Abraham Accords to portray themselves as responsible partners and highlight the Accords' benefits. This is particularly crucial considering the perceived lack of enthusiasm for the Accords by the Biden administration and the conflict's low priority for the administration. Consequently, the success of the Accords hinges on the participating nations' ability to adeptly handle media crises, advance effective public diplomacy, and demonstrate a sincere commitment to resolving the conflict and ensuring regional stability. Such efforts will enable them to earn the trust and confidence of their citizens and the global community, foster cooperation, and enhance mutual understanding within the region.

Media Alliance on Other Avenues for Cooperation

Aside from official media cooperation there are a number of avenues for coordinating and promoting people-to-people engagement. Social media usage is high, especially among young people, so foreign ministries must invest in programs that can train users on how to identify and effectively challenge media bias or misinformation via citizen diplomacy. Though over-reliance on social media platforms can also be damaging and subject to

ensorship, governments should take citizen diplomacy seriously and see it as a necessary rather than superfluous component of diplomatic efforts, due to its powers of persuasion. Online people-to-people interactions, especially among well-informed users, enable both sides to better understand others' viewpoints and interests. For citizen diplomacy to be an effective tool in conflict-resolution, these interactions must also be independent of government. The government's role is to provide resources and training.⁴⁵

Citizen diplomacy refers to a type of public diplomacy that highlights the importance of communication and community development. With the emergence of the internet and social media, citizens now have new channels to engage in diplomacy. Citizen diplomacy can prove to be a powerful tool in promoting peace and understanding, especially during times of conflict. By bringing together individuals from opposing sides and fostering dialogue and comprehension, citizen diplomacy can contribute to creating a more peaceful and equitable world. The US Department of State is actively promoting citizen diplomacy through various initiatives and programs.⁴⁶ In 2017, the Bureau of Global Public Affairs launched the Citizen Diplomacy Award to acknowledge the significant contributions of US citizens and organizations in advancing US foreign policy objectives and enhancing global relationships. Recipients of the award are recognized for their leadership in generating long-term support for US foreign policy and public diplomacy goals. While citizen diplomacy is encouraged to be an independent initiative, it still requires resources, training, and incentives provided by the government.⁴⁷

In addition to digital citizen diplomacy, exchange visits are also significant as they give the opportunity to engage face-to-face on issues of common interest. Citizen diplomacy can benefit from face-to-face interactions, and it is important to include mainstream media in this effort. Inviting Western media specialists, including American Jewish journalists and broadcasters, to visit countries is a valuable opportunity to showcase aspects of the country that are often not mentioned in mainstream media, such as the UAE's humanitarian efforts in Yemen. This can help to counter negative coverage and criticism of the country's role in the war. It is important to extend these invites to not only established journalists but also junior journalists who may be willing to engage without bias or an agenda. The focus should not be solely on promoting the country but on fostering understanding and cooperation on important issues.⁴⁸

To address perceived bias in mainstream media, one potential solution is to establish a collaborative satellite news channel among the nations involved in the Abraham Accords. Additionally, they could consider creating their own news networks to counter perceived bias in US media.⁴⁹ A mobile application called Israel & Middle East News, founded by Professor Mordechai Kedar, offers news, sports, tech, and entertainment with interactive features that allow users to provide feedback on articles through categories such as Must Read, Touching, So True, Troubling, and Biased. Currently available in Hebrew and English, the app plans to expand to include Arabic and other languages in the future. However, further funding is necessary for the app's continued development, and it would be beneficial to establish a board of trustees to oversee its progress.⁵⁰

Another important step would be to create a media platform for translating the television programs and articles produced by groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and other radical political Islamists from Arabic to English. This would allow for a more accurate representation of their views to be presented to the international public, enabling mainstream media to better understand their true nature and double-faced approach. The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) serves as a notable example of a platform that can translate and disseminate their hostile commentary in Arabic through various media channels.⁵¹

The arts provide a promising avenue for promoting peace and tolerance, as evidenced by the agreement between the Israel Film Fund and the Abu Dhabi Film Commission after the signing of the Abraham Accords. This agreement aims to establish joint training and development programs for Emirati and Israeli filmmakers, in collaboration with the Sam Spiegel Film & Television School in Jerusalem, to create films and television shows that promote these values.⁵² The combination of film production and collaborative projects in the filmmaking industry offers a chance to promote peace and tolerance. This platform enables the sharing of various viewpoints, concepts, and cultures. Through portraying the human struggles of both Israelis and Palestinians, films can foster compassion and comprehension, ultimately dismantling stereotypes and decreasing the conflict. As a result, this partnership could potentially generate favorable effects on national security.

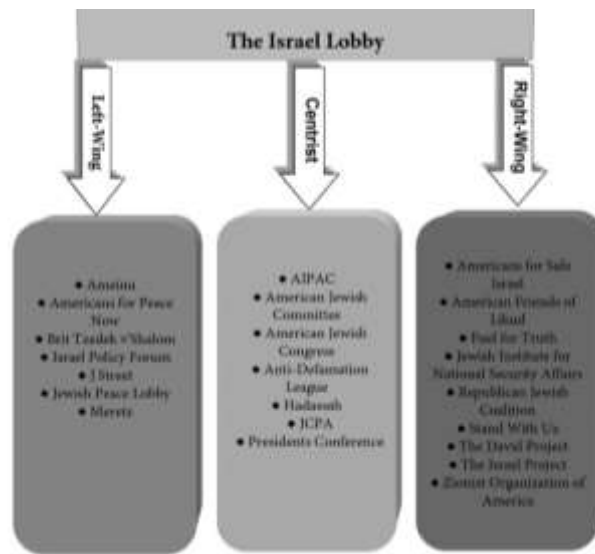
Moreover, the success of the media depends in part on its intellectual reference points. A gigantic media conglomerate can only be successful and influential with the intellectual clout of think tanks. One of the key strengths of the Abraham Accords is that instead of Arab countries and Israel conducting research independently of one another, they can now undertake collaborative studies in numerous fields, including the media. For example, partnerships have already been created between Israeli and Emirati think tanks, such as the one between The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security and TRENDS Research and Advisory of Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates established on October 6, 2020.⁵³ Also, the Emirates Policy Center in Abu Dhabi and the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv announced a trilateral strategic partnership on October 15, 2020.⁵⁴

Israel's think tanks stand out from those in the UAE due to their greater number and presence not just in Israel, but also abroad, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom. This gives them significant influence on policy-making in those countries, particularly as many of their staff hold citizenship in those nations. In addition to the prominent Israeli think tanks, such as the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism⁵⁵, the Israel Center for Social and Economic Progress⁵⁶, the Israel Council on Foreign Relations⁵⁷, the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies⁵⁸, the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs⁵⁹, the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research⁶⁰, the Begin–Sadat Center for Strategic Studies⁶¹ and many others, there are also Israeli think tanks based in the United States, such as The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)⁶², the Israel Institute⁶³, The Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA)⁶⁴, the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies Research Guide⁶⁵, as well as in the United Kingdom, such as the Institute for Jewish Policy Research⁶⁶, the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre⁶⁷, among others. All of these think tanks can contribute to the success of the joint media venture among the Abraham Accords countries.

As well as think tanks, lobby groups in foreign countries can play a significant role in “seeking to influence certain policy-making areas in its preferred direction.”⁶⁸ The main shortcoming of the UAE’s lobbying efforts is that they are focused on the political elite without a grassroots base, undermining its efforts to have the Muslim Brotherhood designated as a terrorist group. The American Muslim community’s counter-lobbying instead played a more effective role in blocking the resolution. In contrast, Israel has successful lobbies in the United States mainly due to the existence of a grassroots base.

The influence of the pro-Israel lobby in US foreign policy in the Middle East has always been a subject of great interest and fierce controversy. The pro-Israel community is neither monolithic nor a unitary actor. In lobbying the US government for what they believe is in Israel’s best interests, the pro-Israel community rarely, if ever speaks with a single voice.⁶⁹ Members of these groups are mostly American Jews, but there is also now a large number of evangelical Christians Zionists involved in pro-Israel activities, which is why the term pro-Israel rather than Jewish, should be used to describe the lobby. ‘Pro-Israel’ is defined

by its political agenda not by religion or ethnicity. The pro-Israel lobby is composed of groups who actively lobby the US government on issues concerning Israel.⁷⁰



The pro-Israel community in the US is composed of three different lobbies: a centrist lobby, a left-wing lobby, and a right-wing lobby. The centrist lobby is composed of established Jewish organizations and focuses on presenting a united front before Congress and the White House, while avoiding controversial issues. The left-wing lobbies prioritize peace between Israel and the Palestinians through diplomacy, engagement, negotiation, and concessions. The right-wing lobbies are skeptical of diplomacy and negotiations with Islamists and see radical Islamism as the greatest threat to Israel.⁷¹

To counter the Muslim Brotherhood and raise awareness about radical Islamism, the UAE may consider collaborating with pro-Israel lobbies in the US. The UAE could form alliances with groups that share its interests, such as evangelical Christians who support the UAE's moderate and tolerant approach to Islam. The pro-Israel lobby's lobbying techniques, including grassroots outreach, could also serve as a valuable learning opportunity for the UAE. In certain areas, the UAE and pro-Israel lobbies could find common ground, such as promoting peace between Israel and the Palestinians through diplomacy and negotiation. This could potentially align with the UAE's own diplomatic efforts in the region. Additionally, the UAE could benefit from these lobbies' support for greater investment and economic ties with Israel. However, the UAE must be strategic in its engagement with these lobbies to avoid any possible negative consequences.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Abraham Accords ushered in a new chapter of diplomatic ties and collaboration between Gulf nations and Israel. Nevertheless, the media remains a crucial area that needs attention. The parties involved must manage and counter disinformation, bias, and polarization in overseas media coverage of their countries, and foster mutual understanding. A coordinated media strategy and effective public diplomacy are essential for the success of the Accords. Aside from official media cooperation, there are many avenues for coordinating and promoting people-to-people engagement, such as citizen diplomacy, exchange visits, and the arts.

Collaborative think tanks and lobbying groups can be valuable assets in promoting successful joint media ventures among the Abraham Accords nations. As we have witnessed in the case of Israel and UAE, both think tanks and lobbying groups can play pivotal roles in facilitating joint media initiatives. Think tanks can serve as intellectual

hubs, providing vital reference points and contributing to cooperative studies across diverse fields, including media. Israeli think tanks, in particular, wield significant influence over policymaking in countries like the United States and United Kingdom, which can further boost the media venture's prospects of success. The joint media venture's success also hinges on the lobbying groups' influence, as they can sway policymaking in their desired direction. While UAE's lobbying efforts have mainly targeted the political elite without a grassroots base, Israel's lobbies in the United States have succeeded due to their strong grassroots support.

To sustain and strengthen the Abraham Accords, participating nations must collaborate in managing media crises and promoting effective public diplomacy. However, establishing media alliances, especially between countries like the UAE and Israel, encounters a formidable obstacle during conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians. To develop a sophisticated media strategy and facilitate effective public diplomacy during such times of turmoil, certain measures can be implemented to manage media crises.

- **Develop a Collaborative Communication Plan:** The UAE and Israel ought to devise a unified communication plan encompassing directives for media collaboration and content sharing, especially during conflict periods. This plan should outline methods for exchanging print, audio, and video materials while fostering diverse perspectives, presenting both Arab and Israeli viewpoints across global media platforms. Tailoring the strategy according to the conflict duration is crucial; shorter conflicts may demand distinct approaches compared to prolonged conflicts like the ongoing Gaza war. A gradual approach is imperative to maintain resonance, preventing unintended public backlash.
- **Encourage Exchanges of Political Analysts and Journalists:** The Abraham Accords countries, including Israel, should encourage exchanges of political analysts and journalists so that they can appear in each other's media and provide context and alternative viewpoints. This will help to ensure that the coverage of the conflict is balanced and nuanced, and it will also promote a greater understanding of each other's perspectives.
- **Emphasize the Importance of Stability:** The Abraham Accords require a stable environment in order to thrive. The UAE and Israel should emphasize the importance of stability and the need to continue to invest in diplomatic relations, even during periods of conflict. They should also underscore the importance of warm peace that fosters people-to-people engagement, rather than cold peace arrangements between governments.
- **Addressing Concerns about Israeli Politics:** In order to alleviate concerns about Israeli politics, it is crucial for the UAE and Israel to tackle apprehensions about right-wing policies. This entails the UAE acknowledging the differences between Israel's right-wing politics and the Democratic/Leftist party in the US, and taking steps to foster a greater comprehension of the intricacies of Israeli politics and the divisions among various parties.
- **Use Digital Citizen Diplomacy to Promote Dialogue:** To enhance citizen diplomacy as a conflict resolution tool, the UAE and Israel can leverage social media platforms to encourage dialogue and engagement among their populations, particularly among those who are knowledgeable about the conflict. Such individuals can help foster greater comprehension of the issues at stake and promote diverse perspectives and interests particularly in times of conflict. To

ensure effectiveness, these interactions should remain independent of government influence, while still requiring government support for resources and training.

- **Monitor and Respond to Media Coverage:** The UAE and Israel should monitor media coverage of the conflict and respond to any inaccuracies or biased reporting. They should work to ensure that the coverage is fair, balanced, and nuanced, and they should be prepared to respond to any negative coverage or misinformation.
- **Coordinate with Other Regional and International Actors:** The UAE and Israel should coordinate with other regional and international actors, such as the United States, to promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict. They should work together to address the underlying issues and promote a greater understanding of each other's perspectives.

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- ⁶⁶ Institute for Jewish Policy Research <https://jpr.org.uk/>
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