

**OPENED AND CLOSED DOORS:
AN INSIDE LOOK AT HOW THE INTERNET CHANGED MIDDLE EAST POLICY**

by
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Abstract

From the mainstream media to citizen journalism, and from politicians to activist groups, the rise of social media and the new Internet age has changed the dynamics of global diplomacy, international decision-making and large-scale movements. The Internet age has altered how individuals interpret foreign relations, mobilize movements and influence policy decisions. In the Middle East especially, social media users have demonstrated the power to propel uprisings on authoritarian regimes, stimulate diplomacy and impact relationships between nations.

In three chapters, this thesis explores how the U.S.-Israel relationship, the Arab Spring and the Iran nuclear deal were all impacted by the rise of the digital age. Specifically, this thesis explores how communications technology has changed over time, how foreign policy is shaped, how international movements rise, how countries' reputations are formed and how the Internet can ultimately impact the outcome of major world decisions.

After examining several case studies, this thesis concludes that the Internet Age has changed how the world receives information. Moreover, the proliferation of social media has provided individuals with more access to news with just a click of a button. Politicians, journalists and activists now have the ability to communicate directly to the public through their 21st Century technology. In conclusion, this thesis is a snapshot of time regarding how the Internet permanently transformed how the way the international community obtains information.

Thesis Reviewers: Robert Guttman, Matt Laslo

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to six special people who have helped and inspired me through this entire process: Jamie Freedman, Tony Freedman, Daniel Freedman, Marty Waxman, Estelle Waxman and Alyssa Backlund. Their love and guidance helped me through every step of the thesis process. I love them with all of my heart.

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Introduction

For centuries, major foreign policy decisions have lived largely behind closed doors.¹ While the media has long served as the general public's primary window into foreign policy,² the recent growth of new technology has brought international affairs into the palms of our hands. The rise of social media and 21st century technologies are rapidly transforming international diplomacy, multi-national decision-making and large-scale movements.³

The 25 years has ushered in extraordinary changes in the way people communicate and receive information around the globe. The Internet age has transformed how individuals interpret foreign relations, mobilize movements and influence policy decisions. While the number of foreign policy decision makers remains relatively small, the number of individuals observing these foreign policy events and decisions has grown exponentially in size⁴ – from chasing Twitter followers to 24/7 breaking news cycles. With rapidly changing technology, individuals can now select news sources that cater to their individual preferences.⁵ While the media ultimately provides a window into the foreign policies of many nations, reporters introduce different perspectives into their news reports.⁶

¹ Olubukola S. Adesina, (2017) Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy, Cogent Social Sciences, 3:1, DOI: [10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175)

² Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*, 5-7.

³ Olubukola S. Adesina, (2017) Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy, Cogent Social Sciences, 3:1, DOI: [10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175)

⁴ Joseph Nye, *The future of power*. (New York, Public Affairs).

⁵ Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*. (Basic Books, 2002), 395.

⁶ Eytan Gilboa, *American Public Opinion toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*.

The Middle East provides a perfect canvas to examine social media's impact on foreign policy. Digital media paints a round-the-clock picture of the region's political climate through breaking news updates, social media channels and live images and on-the-scene videos. The Internet provides individuals with new levels of access to and content on the Middle East from the comfort of our own homes. While the media has long reported on the Middle East, the Internet age has provided a new stage to amplify the news, more options, faster coverage and interactive, live conversations on Middle East policy.

This thesis explores how communications technology has changed over time, how foreign policy is shaped, how international movements rise, how countries' reputations are formed and how the Internet can ultimately impact the outcome of major world decisions. While social media and the Internet age is a relatively new concept to study academically, this thesis examines a variety of academic literature on political communications to discover how the digital age impacts foreign policy.

While digital technology has changed how we receive the news and reach larger audiences, political scientist Paul Starr argues that "new technologies also created new occasions for public decisions about communications and new opportunities for monopolizing as well as diffusing knowledge. These developments threatened to take American communications along a much different path from the one it started on."⁷

Since its early days, the press has thrived because it provides individuals with an avenue to express themselves without government intervention.⁸ While new technology

⁷ Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*, 395.

⁸ *Ibid.* Pp 394-396.

has changed the way the news is presented, the power of the press remains the same. Each new communication development brings both current global events and governmental decisions closer to home. These advances in modern communications have strengthened the power of the media and cemented its importance on the world stage.⁹

However, Starr proposes that even though technology is changing, the style in which people communicate remains the same.¹⁰ This thesis argues that the Internet has – in fact – changed how various stakeholders communicate on foreign policy decisions. This is simply due to increased access and fewer barriers due to technology.¹¹ The Internet has not changed how the world communicates entirely, but it levels the playing field between the mainstream media, citizen journalists, policymakers and the general public. New technology creates more choices in terms of receiving information and spurs more interactive conversations between policymakers, journalists and U.S. citizens.

This thesis, organized into three chapters, explores how a number of Middle Eastern countries are interpreted and observed via social media. Additionally, I explore how a variety of regional issues, wars and events have played out on computer screens and how their coverage via digital technology has differed from traditional media sources. The first chapter delves into the U.S.-Israel relationship and showcases how major events were displayed before and during the Internet age. The second chapter

⁹ Ibid. Pp 394-398.

¹⁰ Ibid. Pp 394-398.

¹¹ Joseph Nye, *The future of power*. (New York, Public Affairs).

focuses on how social media can be used to mobilize movements – using the Arab Spring as a case study. The third chapter focuses on Iran and the social media efforts from both the Obama and Trump administrations to both enter and exit the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – better known as the Iran nuclear deal.

Reviewing the Literature: How is Foreign Policy Opinion Formed?

International affairs is a ripe topic of study in the digital age because the Internet provides a platform for individuals to peer into the foreign policy and major events occurring in other nations. Foreign policy public opinion is often influenced by a person's outside knowledge and perceptions and how the media reports on intra-governmental relationships.¹² As such, there are many lenses through which Americans view foreign policy.¹³ These include: realism (which makes broad assumptions that all nations are motivated by national interests),¹⁴ liberalism (which looks at how a nation enhances an individual's freedom),¹⁵ and constructivism (which claims that specific aspects of global affairs are created through historical and social constructs).¹⁶ Each interpretation of foreign policy can shed light on how nations judge other countries. While all three of these concepts are found in the United States' foreign policy agenda, these individual views are often exacerbated by the type of media that U.S. citizens follow. With more choices than ever before, individuals can choose where their media comes from and what point of view the news presents specifically regarding foreign policy.

Foreign policy is often defined as how a government makes decisions in its relationships with other nations.¹⁷ Media outlets are a chief source to understand foreign policy because for many consumers of media, nations in the news are often "out of

¹² Stephen Ansolabehere, Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi and Kenneth A. Shepsle. *American Government: Power and Purpose*. (Paperback Good Books, 2013).

¹³ Terry Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Pp 85-87.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* Pp 91.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Pp 71-72.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Pp 11.

reach, out of sight, out of mind.”¹⁸ Americans learn about foreign policy issues through the news and integrate that material into their viewpoints. While many scholars have provided definitions of public opinion, there is much less focus on foreign policy opinion.¹⁹ Therefore, this thesis melds together ideas from foreign policy, public opinion and digital media experts to discover the lasting impact 21st Century technology has on international affairs.

As social media and Internet use increases, the digital age has become a leading source for both policy and political information.²⁰ In the United States, the media plays an important role in helping the public interpret, observe and mobilize on foreign policy information.²¹ Consequently, public opinion and the media often go hand-in-hand in shaping Americans’ view of the world. U.S. citizens receive their news from three main media outlets: broadcast media (radio and television), print media (newspapers and magazines), and, the latest form of communication -- the Internet.²² Therefore, when looking at how the American public interpret international events, it is crucial to analyze how the media ties into the results.²³

According to scholar James Rosenau, foreign policy opinion is described as “any set of ideas, either informative or judgmental, about any concept on the world stage.”²⁴

¹⁸ Ibid. Pp 29.

¹⁹ Eytan Gilboa, *American Public Opinion toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 5.

²⁰ Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein. *Users of the world, United*. (Business Horizons, 2010), p.p. 59-68.

²¹ Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*, 395.

²² Stephen Ansolabehere, Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi and Kenneth A. Shepsle. *American Government: Power and Purpose*. (Paperback Good Books, 2013).

²³ Stephen Ansolabehere, Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi and Kenneth A. Shepsle. *American Government: Power and Purpose*. (Paperback Good Books, 2013).

²⁴ Eytan Gilboa, *American Public Opinion toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 5.

Because many Americans view foreign policy news through their television screens,²⁵ political leaders and the press often set the foreign policy agenda for them. Rosenau's theory provides a lens through which citizens, observers, and elites see governmental foreign policy decision making. Putting his theory on foreign policy opinion into practice, there are several different models that explore how people interpret the information they receive and how they form opinions and act on what flashes before their computer screens. One way this can be measured is through public opinion polls. Opinion polls provide a window into how the public understands and acts on a range of issues.

Roseneau's public opinion model focuses on how news flows from major media outlets to opinion makers and then on to the public.²⁶ Generally, this model has been accepted as comprehensive in explaining how American public opinion affects foreign policy.²⁷ The media circulate opinions between decision makers and elites whom he labels "opinion makers." While this theory holds merit, the Internet is beginning to cut the role of the "opinion makers" out of the equation.²⁸ Therefore, while I agree with Rosneau's view that public opinion is often influenced by media outlets, my thesis showcases how the alleged "opinion maker" is specifically removed from the situation.

The Receive-Accept-Sample (RAS) model, constructed by John Zaller, can help determine an individuals' interpretation of public opinion through various lenses. It is

²⁵ Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*. (Basic Books, 2002), 395.

²⁶ James Rosneau. *National Leadership and Foreign Policy: A Case in the Mobilization of Public Support*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 132

²⁷ Eytan Gilboa, *American Public Opinion toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 5.

²⁸ Stephen Ansolabehere, Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi and Kenneth A. Shepsle. *American Government: Power and Purpose*. (Paperback Good Books, 2013).

crucial that the questions are framed in a way that ensures objectivity.²⁹ If questions are clearly swayed in one direction, then the results of the polling will be inaccurate. The model distinctly measures how the person receives information, how the person interprets that information based on individual preconceived notions, and how the person processes this information with the tools readily available to them. While this model has garnered mixed opinions from scholars,³⁰ it still has some groundbreaking coverage regarding how people's preconceived notions impact how they interpret the news and view other countries.³¹

While Rosenau and Zaller focus on public opinion, political scientist E.E. Schattschneider has examined the public's participation and role in political affairs. Schattschneider has repeatedly discussed that "at the nub of politics are, first, the way in which the public participates in the spread of the conflict and, second, the process by which the unstable relation of the public to the conflict is controlled."³² By expanding the scope of conflict, Schattschneider's analysis observes how political issues can be created by outside factors such as organizations, political parties and interest groups.

Moreover, these influencing factors can sway how individuals interpret conflicts both on the domestic and global stage. This paper will take this idea to the next level as it observes how partisan media and policymakers can broadcast these overall ideas

²⁹ Elmo Wilson. "The Measurement of Public Opinion." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, (March, 1947) <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271624725000117>

³⁰ Agnieszka Dobrzynska and André Blais, "Testing Zaller's Reception and Acceptance Model in an Intense Election Campaign." *Political Behavior*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Jun., 2008), pp. 259-276. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40213315>

³¹ M.R. Alvarez. *When politics and models collide: Estimating models of multiparty elections*. (American Journal of Political Science, 1998), p.p. 42, 55.

³² E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semi- Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc).

from individual entities through the Internet Age. Because decision makers and interest groups can communicate directly to the people, the overall political process has changed by enabling a direct online channel to converse with decision-makers. Moreover, while policymakers have created a more direct line to the public through social media, there is also a responsibility to be more transparent with their messaging and talking points. This thesis will examine how government officials utilize social media, as well as how their supporters trust the accuracy of their social media content.³³

In a modern twist on the works of Starr, Rosneau, Zaller and Schattschneider, the next three chapters analyze how the new media age has played a major role in Middle East policy. By looking into how foreign policy is made, how the public views international affairs and how various parties can influence the scope of a global conflict, I will survey how digital media influences U.S. opinions of Middle East events and policies.

³³ Ibid.

Chapter 1: The Internet Age Has Changed the Way Americans Interpret Foreign Policy – A Look at the U.S.-Israel Relationship in the 20th and 21st Centuries

While newspapers and television played a predominant role in reporting foreign policy in the 20th century, the 21st century led to a more interactive interpretation of global-scale events. Social media, as a whole, has provided unprecedented access to international affairs as a whole. Now, the public can get inside the minds of government leaders to truly understand how they develop a concept, idea or major accord. However, with media outlets and outside organizations able to reach larger audiences at a faster rate, the message in foreign policy often gets skewed as more individuals and groups publicly broadcast their views to a wider audience. This chapter focuses on how public opinion impacts foreign policy and Americans' views of Israel. From the Six Day War to Operation Protective Edge, headlines highlighting Israel's national security and foreign policy have long dominated American news. Yet, while Israel has always played a major role in the news, the 24/7 news cycle through the Internet has brought images, live feeds and tweets into the coverage of the U.S.-Israel relationship. Since Israel's establishment in 1948, the media has played an increasingly large role in shaping American perceptions of Israel.³⁴ This chapter poses the question: to what extent does the media impact U.S. public perception of Israel and how has that changed in the Internet age? Moreover, how does media bias infiltrate the overall foreign policy conversation and which variables play a role in altering the public's mindset? This

³⁴ Eytan Gilboa, *American Public Opinion toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (D.C. Lexington Books, 1987), 305-306.

chapter strives to shed light on the connection between the American media's portrayal of Israel and the U.S. general public's view of the Jewish state. As the demand for partisan media increases, is public opinion on global issues similarly impacted?³⁵ Additionally, it explores how partisan media might make a difference in how Americans view foreign policy—with a primary focus on the U.S.-Israel relationship. Finally, this chapter identifies key developments in the U.S. media's approach regarding Israel due to changes in technology. The chapter sheds light on how Americans formulate their perceptions of the Jewish state and provides policy recommendations on how Israel can improve its standing on the world stage.

In order to better understand how the U.S.-Israel relationship is impacted by the role of media and public opinion, I outline the characterizations of public opinion, foreign policy and the role of the media. Public opinion and the media often serve an important role in setting foreign policy objectives in the United States. By definition, public opinion is described as “an aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of a community.”³⁶

In the United States, the role of public opinion continues to provide a window into where Americans stand on various issues.³⁷ “As the standard by which we judge the strength of American democracy, public opinion—its origins, its development, and its influence—is a key concern of modern political science. Operating at both the individual

³⁵ Allison Archer, *Political Advantage, Disadvantage, and the Demand for Partisan News*, (Journal of Politics, 2018), 1-4.

³⁶ Phillips Davidson. *Public Opinion*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/public-opinion>

³⁷ Stephen Ansolabehere, Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi and Kenneth A. Shepsle. *American Government: Power and Purpose*. (Paperback Good Books, 2013).

level and the collective level, public preferences are quite complex.”³⁸ Therefore, public opinion itself is crucial both historically and in modern times to gauge how a nation’s citizens feel toward a particular issue.

From mainstream news to social media, the general public is increasingly able to make up their own mind about foreign policy decisions by receiving the news directly.³⁹ Therefore, when examining how U.S. citizens form opinions on Israel based on the role of the media, I look at how the news travels directly to the people through the Internet rather than how it is disseminated from the “opinion-makers.”⁴⁰ One of the best ways to examine how the media impacts U.S. perception of other countries is through headline and image analysis.⁴¹ Through looking at a combination of headlines, images and social media posts, I determine how the media has portrayed a number of events impacting the U.S-Israel relationship. This provides a window into how the role of media impacts U.S. perceptions of other countries.⁴²

When looking at the U.S.-Israel relationship, it is crucial to weigh a number of factors to determine how the role of media impacts the public’s perception of Israel. Some of these factors include: reporter bias, partisan influences and preconceived notions from the reader. In the next section, I look at each of these factors to determine if there is a correlation between the U.S. media’s presentation of Israel and the shaping

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ James Rosneau. *National Leadership and Foreign Policy: A Case in the Mobilization of Public Support*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 132

⁴¹ David Mayhew. *Divided We Govern Party Control, Lawmaking and Investigations*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) 9-15.

⁴² Ibid. Pp 9-11.

of public opinion about the Jewish state. By examining the news through headlines, I will be able to observe how individuals form their opinions of Israel through the role of the media.

Why Public Opinion is Important Regarding the U.S.-Israel Relationship

Since the U.S.-Israel alliance is robust,⁴³ U.S. public opinion and the role of the media in forming that view is imperative to maintaining a strong relationship. Viewed as the world leader in international influence,⁴⁴ American decisions on foreign policy are impactful in the global arena. Small nations like Israel benefit greatly from a strong alliance with the United States both economically and politically.⁴⁵ Unlike the other Middle Eastern nations, the U.S.-Israel alliance is built on shared interests, values, and a commitment to rule of law.⁴⁶ The United States enjoys a long-range foreign affairs strategy with Israel, meaning that the “strategic breadth applies not only across subjects but also over time.”⁴⁷

By examining how the United States media presents Israel, analysts can have a window into how public opinion might influence the U.S.-Israel alliance. As a keystone of the U.S. foreign policy strategy, America provides Israel with annual security assistance to aid Israel’s protection against looming threats on its borders. By

⁴³ Robert D. Blackwill and Philip H. Gordon. “*Repairing the U.S.-Israel Relationship.*” Council of Foreign Relations, (November 2016). <https://www.cfr.org/report/repairing-us-israel-relationship>.

⁴⁴ U.S. News and World Report. “Most Influential Countries.” 2019.

⁴⁵ Walter Russell Mead, “The New Israel and the Old: Why Gentile Americans Back the Jewish State,” *Foreign Affairs*, (2008).

⁴⁶ Walter Russell Mead, “The New Israel and the Old: Why Gentile Americans Back the Jewish State.”

⁴⁷ Terry Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), 101.

committing to provide \$38 billion to Israel over the next ten years,⁴⁸ America strives to maintain the Jewish state's safety and security in a chaotic region. In addition to receiving security assistance, Israel has purchased a fleet of F-35 fighter jets from America to enhance its defense arsenal even further.⁴⁹

In terms of foreign policy constructs, the United States views Israel as a strong strategic ally because both nations are dedicated to key liberal ideas such as commitment to democracy and rule of law.⁵⁰ However, Israel has a clear foreign policy focus on security. In a realist perspective, Israel has to survive against all odds. Therefore, Israel's motivations to defend itself at all costs⁵¹ often hinder U.S. public opinion on Israel.⁵² On the world stage, Israel is a small country with a large number of adversaries. As Middle East and South Asian expert observed, "If you look at the size of Israel, if there were an enemy country out there that could potentially use nukes against them, for them that's a doomsday scenario, and they cannot even tolerate a single strike."⁵³ In the face of mounting threats on its borders, Israel has increased its cooperation with the United States to teach it how to combat these shared threats.⁵⁴ By working with the United States, Israel has taught America new techniques to improve its

⁴⁸ Emma Green, "Why Does the United States Give So Much Money to Israel?"

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/09/united-states-israel-memorandum-of-understanding-military-aid/500192/>.

⁴⁹ Sebastian, Roblin, "Israel Might Have the Ultimate Weapons: Custom-Build F-35 Stealth Fighters" <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/israels-air-force-might-have-the-ultimate-weapon-custom-25983>.

⁵⁰ Eytan Gilboa, *American Public Opinion toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 5.

⁵¹ Terry Deibel, *Foreign Affairs Strategy*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11.

⁵² Eytan Gilboa, *American Public Opinion toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 8.

⁵³ Mike Pearl, "We Asked a Military Expert What Would Happen if Iran Had Nuclear Weapons." https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/jmax57/what-would-happen-if-iran-had-nuclear-weapons-772.

⁵⁴ The American Israel Public Affairs Committee. "Support Assistance to Israel."

<https://www.aipac.org/learn/legislative-agenda/agenda-display/2019-support-assistance-for-israel-and-foreign-aid>.

own safety and security.⁵⁵ Defense collaboration in training as well as research and development have helped both countries keep their soldiers safe, strengthen their militaries and protect their homelands. Additionally, the Israel Defense Forces and the U.S. military share technologies and techniques that greatly benefit both nations.⁵⁶

In terms of policy, security assistance remains a staple of U.S. foreign policy. As a policy, the U.S. commits itself to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge (QME)—that is, the technological, tactical, and other advantages that allow it to deter numerically superior adversaries. This allows Israel to garner the resources it needs to protect American interests abroad without the United States placing troops on the ground. “Although there is no official U.S. government definition of QME, American policymakers have often described QME as ensuring that Israel has the ability to defend itself against any likely combination of regional threats.”⁵⁷

In terms of politics, the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) nearly three decades ago marked a significant policy change that continues to be hailed as a bipartisan achievement. “Since its founding in 1948, Israel has been unique in the Middle East: it is a country with a democratic government committed to the rule of law, separation of powers, and civilian oversight of the military; with widespread individual freedoms; and with a dynamic and innovative scientific and business environment. As

⁵⁵ The American Israel Public Affairs Committee. “Briefing Book 2019.” <https://www.aipac.org/-/media/publications/policy-and-politics/aipac-analyses/briefing-book/aipac-briefing-book.pdf>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ William Wunderle and Andre Briere, “U.S. Foreign Policy and Israel's Qualitative Military Edge: The Need for a Common Vision,” *The Washington Institute For Near East Policy*, (2006).

U.S. interests in the region evolved after World War II, Israel evolved in an increasingly pro-U.S. direction.”⁵⁸

Challenging this foreign policy process, some analysts have pushed back on this long-standing U.S. foreign policy strategy. “Labeling Israel a strategic asset to the U.S. is questionable when considering that what little strategic value exists comes from limited Israeli help combating the very terror organizations the alliance helped create. It is a circular argument.”⁵⁹ The author argues that “a more even-handed approach to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, a policy that recognizes the significant strategic benefits of support to and cooperation with the Arab states, would provide a much more real strategic benefit and reduce the economic and military cost to the United States in the future.”⁶⁰

Since Israel is America’s closest ally in the Middle East, media coverage and the role of public opinion may be more critical due to the fact that the Jewish state is aligned so closely with the United States. In the next section, I will conduct a number of case studies to explore the relationship between the role of media and public perception of Israel. Moreover, I will explore how changes in media and the rise in partisan news impact U.S. perceptions of the Jewish state.

For this study, I conduct a process case study and look at the events surrounding a series of decisions or actions. I plan to measure the events surrounding the U.S.-

⁵⁸ Haim Malka, “Crossroads: The Future of the U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. (2011).

⁵⁹ Keith Tighe, Maj. “Israel: Strategic Asset or Strategic Liability?” *USMC Command and Staff College, Marine Corps University*. (February 2013).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Israel relationship at the times in question and measure how the journalists covered those events. Specifically, I explore how journalists leveraged the media to shape foreign policy opinions on the Six Day War, Operation Protective Edge and the March of Return. With each case study, I observe how an individual digested the media, how the person used the media to form an opinion of the events surrounding the U.S.-Israel relationship, and how the person answered questions by using considerations that are immediately salient or accessible to them.⁶¹

Additionally, I look at previous public opinion surveys to see if a trend exists between media coverage and Israel's public image. While this case study focuses mostly on mainstream media content and less on individual social media posts, I plan to explore how the wave of new digital media has affected the United States' perception of Israel from a statistical standpoint. Lastly, I examine the role of partisan politics in swaying an individual's opinion of the Jewish state and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the partisan news they read online.

Pre-Internet Age: The Six Day War

In order to examine the Internet Age's impact, I need to first look at how the world perceived the U.S.-Israel relationship before social media exploded onto the scene. The Six Day War provides a control to observe how the media reported on a widespread event in the Middle East without the Internet. This case study explores how the media portrayed the Six Day War to the American public. By comparing newspaper articles with U.S. public opinions, I will garner insight into how Americans interpret the media.

⁶¹ John Zeller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, 50.

By looking into how U.S. citizens viewed Israel in the pre-Internet age, I will be able to see how the media changed once the Internet was born and how the Internet impacted the average American's assessment on the Jewish state.

Background Information Regarding the Six Day War

The Six Day War defined a major shift in U.S. public opinion in regard to Israel.⁶² In June 1967, the Six Day War between Israel and its neighboring countries permanently changed the course of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In less than a week, the Jewish State handily defeated Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Jordan—conquering the Old City of Jerusalem, the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. In just six days, Israel proved that it was a military strength that could singlehandedly defend itself from numerous border threats. The Six Day War not only redrew the map of the Middle East, but it also forever altered the world's view of Israel.

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How did a tiny state no bigger than New Jersey handily defeat three armies and gain large amounts of territory in just six days? Moreover, with Israel's vastly expanded territory, how was the young nation able to adapt to its new reality and transform from a struggling 19-year old country to a strong nation on the world stage?

Even though Israel launched a preemptive strike, the Arab nations had set the stage for an attack for more than a decade.⁶⁴ An era of relative calm prevailed in the Middle East during the late 1950s and early 1960s, but the political situation continued

⁶² Michael Oren, *Six Days of War*. (Oxford University Press, 2002). 1-5.

⁶³ Michael Oren, *Six Days of War*. (Oxford 2002), 20-50.

⁶⁴ Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East, Revised ed.* (New York: Vintage, 2005), pp. 145-192.

to rest on a knife's edge. Arab leaders were aggrieved by their military losses and the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees created by Israel's victory in the 1948 war.⁶⁵ From closing the Straits of Tiran to ordering U.N. peacekeepers out of the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt had made strides toward war. In May, Egypt had moved a large military force from Cairo to the Sinai—a stone's throw from Israel. In 1956, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's decided to nationalize the Suez Canal – sparking the Suez Canal Crisis.⁶⁶ By the mid-1960s, Syrian-backed Palestinian guerillas had begun staging attacks across the Israeli border, provoking reprisal raids from the Israel Defense Forces.

On June 5, after several weeks of strategic planning, Israel launched a surprise air attack on Egypt. In a little over an hour, Israeli jets destroyed 90 percent of the Egyptian air force. In Michael's Oren's book *Six Days of War*,⁶⁷ the author describes a day-by-day account of what happened during this war. "The Egyptian pilots were in a state of shock, incredulous of Israel's ability to penetrate their defense, to catch them so totally off-guard ... No one had ever imagined that a single squadron could neutralize an entire air base," he wrote.⁶⁸ That same day, Israel launched a similar attack on Jordan. Once Israel achieved air superiority, Israel was able to focus on the ground troops as the surrounding Arab states began their counter attacks. Syria, Jordan, and Iraq retaliated with air strikes on Israeli targets including Tel Aviv, Netanya, and other cities. In the days following, Israeli ground troops captured the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the entire West Bank. On the fourth day, Israel reunified Jerusalem by capturing the

⁶⁵ Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East, Revised ed.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Michael Oren, *Six Days of War*. (Oxford 2002), 175.

⁶⁸ Michael Oren, *Six Days of War*. (Oxford 2002), 175.

Old City and its holy sites. In a small amount of time, Egypt lost between 10,000-15,000 men, Jordan lost around 7,000 soldiers and Syria lost around 450. Israel, by comparison, lost only 679 soldiers. Moreover, Egypt lost “all but 15 percent of its military hardware.”⁶⁹ Six days later, on June 10, the U.N. brokered a ceasefire and the war was over.

What Changed in the Global Arena After the Six Day War?

The Six Day War brought on a new level of transformation to the Jewish state—both in physical size and in the world’s perception of Israel.⁷⁰ For the first time, Israel was seen by the world as a force of strength rather than a weak nation. In order to understand the changing dynamic, it is important to first understand precisely what happened to cause this change.

Despite the war only lasting six days, Israel won a landslide victory against three much larger nations. Moreover, the war created a shift in the U.S.-Israel relationship.⁷¹ While the United States was the first nation in the world to recognize Israel, they had lukewarm relations with the Jewish state until that point. The Six Day War was a wake-up call for the U.S. government. On one hand, they were blown away by Israel’s military readiness in defeating three much larger armies. On the other hand, they realized just how close Israel is to enemy territory. One of the most important outcomes of the Six Day War came from Israel’s closer diplomatic ties with the United States.⁷² Before the

⁶⁹ Michael Oren, *Six Days of War*. (Oxford 2002), 305.

⁷⁰ Michael Oren, *Six Days of War*. (Oxford 2002), 305.

⁷¹ Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East, Revised ed.* (New York: Vintage, 2005), pp. 145-192.

⁷² The American Israel Public Affairs Committee. “Briefing Book 2019.” <https://www.aipac.org/-/media/publications/policy-and-politics/aipac-analyses/briefing-book/aipac-briefing-book.pdf>.

Six Day War, Israel heavily relied on France as its closest ally. In the aftermath of the Six Day War, the U.S.-Israel relationship began to grow and blossom.

It is clear the U.S. and Israeli governments became closer following the Six Day War. However, what was American public opinion on Israel during this growth in U.S.-Israel relations? Through media analysis, the effect of the Six Day War can be seen through an analysis of historic newspaper articles. Contemporary newspapers can provide an inside look into what caused the war, what created the resulting changes, how the leaders made tough decisions, how Israel decisively won and how the Six Day War changed the state of Arab-Israeli relations for years to come. Table 1 provides some highlights of how news headlines changed before and after the Six Day War.

TABLE 1

During the War ⁷³	After the War
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Jews, Arabs, War!” Fight in South, Report Cairo Bombed,” Chicago Tribune • “Israel Claims Major Land, Air Gains,” Washington Post • “U.N. Calls for Ceasefire: Israel Troops Smashing Toward Suez,” Albuquerque Journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “1967 war: Six days that changed the Middle East,” BBC • “In 1967, Israel’s Six Day War Changed Religion,” The New York Times • “Israel’s 1967 Victory Is Something to Celebrate,” The New York Times

⁷³ JSTOR, Six Day War, 2019.

<https://www.jstor.org/action/doAdvancedSearch?searchType=facetSearch&sd=1967&ed=1969&q0=six%20day%20war&f0=all&c1=AND&f1=all&c2=AND&f2=all&c3=AND&f3=all&c4=AND&f4=all&c5=AND&f5=all&c6=AND&f6=all&acc=on&ar=on&group=none&pagemark=cGFnZU1hcms9Mg%3D%3D>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “War Ends, Total Israel Victory” -> Springfield Republican • “Egyptians Trapped in Sinai, Accept Truce” -> The Jerusalem Post • “Foes Heed Ceasefire, Halting War, Russia Cuts Israeli Ties,” The Washington Post • “Israeli, Egyptian Tanks Battle in Sinai Desert,” Springfield Republican • “The six-day war: Israel claims land and air successes as Britain and US declare neutrality,” The Guardian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Six Days and 50 Years of War,” The New York Times • “Still Stuck Between May and June of 1967” -> The New York Times • “The 1967 Arab-Israeli war took six days. But 50 years later, it’s still not over” -> The Washington Post • “The Six Day War: Palestinians’ Opportunity of the Century,” The Washington Times • “50th Anniversary Of The 1967 Six-Day War: Why History Matters,” The Huffington Post • “For Palestinians, It’s Lights Out at the Washington Post”, Algemeiner
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*All headlines were found via JSTOR.

By analyzing the headlines, there are stark differences between how the Six Day War was portrayed back in 1967 vs. the aftermath 50 years later. While the news headlines in 1967 showcase Israel as a source of strength, the analysis pieces from 50 years later display more uncertainty in the result of the war. During the Six Day War, Americans received most of their news from traditional media sources. Therefore, they generally viewed the war as a favorable result. Through these headlines, Israel was

portrayed as a source of strength. Israel is shown as having achieved a decisive military victory. In the early 1960s, Israel had a core press of 50 foreign correspondents and a number of bureaus were maintained by foreign outlets, such as the *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and *Newsweek*.⁷⁴ “Following the war, many correspondents returned home and wrote glowing articles. In America, the war had special resonance because of its contrast with the Vietnam War, where the U.S. was bogged down and had deployed 535,000 soldiers. The war also turned Israel into a center of world news, with the number of correspondents based in the country quadrupling to 200,” wrote Medzini.⁷⁵ On the global front, the international community remained quiet on the war—with no demands for a ceasefire or to establish the principle of territory for peace.

Following the war, most of the American press reported favorably on Israel. However, because Americans mostly received their news from traditional news outlets during this time, partisan media did not play a significant role in formulating public opinion at the time. In my analysis, the Six Day War put Israel on the map both as a military power and a potential partner for the United States in the Middle East. While Israel was “thrown into a crisis” because the Jewish state believed it was facing an existential danger,⁷⁶ the Jewish state’s unprecedented victory and land acquisition changed America’s perception of Israel.

Following Israel’s decisive victory, the Jewish state’s relationship with America began to thrive. According to Pew, larger numbers of Americans placed their primary

⁷⁴ Meron Medzini, "1967: The international media and the Six-Day War," Fathom, (2017).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East*, 145-192.

sympathy with Israel rather than with Arab states or with the Palestinians.⁷⁷ “That support is a near constant in American public opinion about the Middle East, beginning with Israel’s creation as a state in May 1948,” wrote Pew Research. According to a Gallup poll, “45 percent of Americans sympathized more with Israel than with the Arab states, 4 percent sympathized more with the Arab states and 26 percent with neither. Another 24 percent had no opinion.”⁷⁸

Between the favorable public opinion polls and the positive-to-neutral media press across the board, I would argue that the role of media did play a role in shaping American’s public opinion on Israel during the Six Day War. By painting Israel as a military powerhouse, the U.S. citizens were likely more accepting of increased relations between the two nations. Moreover, Americans’ interpretation of Israel from the media is a successful country that defeated the more powerful Arab nations.

Additionally, prior to the war, Levi Eshkol became the first Israeli prime minister to be invited for an official state visit to Washington. During the visit, he began to develop a strong relationship with President Lyndon Johnson. This connection led to advanced weapons purchases from America in 1965. Israeli diplomat Abba Eban also worked closely to build ties with the rest of the world including the United States before the Six Day War. He recognized that the people of the United States would not change their minds overnight about their relationship with Israel. By making themselves a player in America’s eyes, the United States was ready to bolster their relationship.

⁷⁷ Robert Ruby. *A Six-Day War: Its Aftermath in American Public Opinion*, (New York, Pew Research, 2007).

<https://www.pewforum.org/2007/05/30/a-six-day-war-its-aftermath-in-american-public-opinion/>

⁷⁸ Robert Ruby. *A Six-Day War: Its Aftermath in American Public Opinion*, (New York, Pew Research, 2007). <https://www.pewforum.org/2007/05/30/a-six-day-war-its-aftermath-in-american-public-opinion/>

By laying this foundation and growing the United States' knowledge base regarding the Jewish state, Israel's leaders were able to lay the groundwork toward a robust relationship following the 1967 Six Day War. The Six Day War highlighted two important reasons for a strategic relationship between Israel and the United States. First, it showcased how Israel's location and close proximity to its neighbors threatened its existence. Second, it displayed how the United States could benefit from Israel's critical thinking and expertise through a close partnership with the Jewish state.

The Six Day War was one of the most pivotal events in Israel's history because it helped change U.S. perceptions of the country's strength. The Jewish state defied the odds and overcame an existential threat. Though short, the war demonstrated how Israel's military effectiveness and strategic planning enabled it to defeat larger adversaries. From the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the Syrian Civil War, Israel's redrawn map from the 1967 war has impacted Israel for more than 50 years. This change effort was deemed an overall success because it changed Israel's standing on the world stage from struggling nation to thriving country.

One unsuccessful outcome of the Six Day War was the Jewish state's failure to solve the Palestinian refugee crisis resulting from the war. By acquiring new territory in the Six Day War, Israel gained 1.2 million Palestinians who remain under their rule.⁷⁹ At the conclusion of the war, Israel's leaders decided to leave the Palestinian refugee crisis for a later date. Israel's military victory, in turn, became a political dilemma that is still prevalent in today's headlines. Since 1967, the land obtained by Israel in the Six Day

⁷⁹ Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East, Revised ed.* (New York: Vintage, 2005), 145-192.

War has been at the center of efforts to end the Arab-Israeli conflict. While the Six Day War had momentous geopolitical consequences in the Middle East, it also fanned the flames of the Arab-Israeli conflict. With this major military success, Israelis also became somewhat overconfident in their manner. After handily defeating three armies, they believed that they were unstoppable. However, this self-assured attitude was soon squashed during the Arab nations' retaliation. On October 6, 1973, hoping to win back territory lost to Israel during the Six Day War, Egyptian and Syrian forces launched a coordinated attack against Israel on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. Taking the Israeli Defense Forces by surprise, Egyptian troops swept deep into the Sinai Peninsula, while Syria struggled to throw occupying Israeli troops out of the Golan Heights. However, the United States saved the day due to a massive American airlift to counter Soviet supplies to Egypt and Syria. Despite this major setback and the aforementioned refugee crisis, the Six Day War is still considered a leadership success.

While Israel's military effectiveness was one major takeaway from the 1967 war, the actual battle was just the beginning of a larger change movement. "Today, fifty years after the war, most Arab leaders accept Israel's existence and even view it as a bulwark against Iran. Because of the Six-Day War, the Syrian civil war rages far from the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, the border before 1967. An Israel strengthened strategically and economically by the war serves as a democratic, pro-American anchor in a still-chaotic Middle East."⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Michael Oren, "How the Six Day War Safeguarded Israel As the Middle East's Democratic Anchor", Newsweek, June, 2017. <https://www.newsweek.com/six-day-war-transformed-israel-middle-east-democratic-anchor-620831>.

Some of these changes from the redrawn map of the Middle East in 1967 played a role in U.S. public opinion and media coverage in the case studies that is later played out online. From Prime Minister Eshkol's leadership to Israeli military and diplomatic leaders' commitment to this change movement, the Six Day War altered the U.S. media coverage and public opinion of Israel to an image of strength. However, with the birth of the Internet and the unresolved issues surrounding the 1967 map of Israel, there was less of a unified front regarding how U.S. citizens viewed Israel.

The Internet, the Media and Operation Protective Edge

In the years since the Six Day War, the media has undergone a vast transformation. Gone are the days when people picked up their local newspaper or turned on the television to get all their news. The Internet now reigns supreme.⁸¹ As Israel's public image changed in the years following the Six Day War from struggling nation to military power, the Jewish state also began to suffer media bias online.

While this bias occurred in print and television forums as well, that bias was strongly manifested during Operation Protective Edge in 2014 due to the increased access of information from the Internet Age. Spurred by a Hamas kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teens in the West Bank and a suspected revenge killing of an Arab youth in East Jerusalem, Operation Protective Edge was a seven-week military conflict between Hamas and Israel. Similar to other Hamas-Israel operations, Hamas fired thousands of rockets into Israel and militants clashed with the IDF on the ground. However, this conflict was different from the others. The role of U.S. media bias played

⁸¹ Bradford Fitch, *Media Relations Handbook: for Government, Associations, Nonprofits, and Elected Officials*, (2013).

a large role in forming U.S. public opinion on the Gaza-Israel conflict. ⁸²“While global mania about Israeli actions has come to be taken for granted, it is actually the result of decisions made by individual human beings in positions of responsibility—in this case, journalists and editors. The world is not responding to events in this country, but rather to the description of these events by news organizations.”⁸³

One interesting media comparison during Operation Protective Edge was how the terrorist group Hamas mastered leveraging the conversation. Taking advantage of the Internet, Hamas used information warfare and the media to paint Israel in a negative light.⁸⁴ To accomplish this task, Hamas engaged in a “series of distortions, deceptions, and disruptions of journalists trying to report on the situation in Gaza.”⁸⁵ In 2014, Hamas placed strict media guidelines on its people in order to help drive the narrative. Hamas's Ministry of Interior in Gaza published a video regarding "cautious and effective" social media use during the conflict with Israel. ⁸⁶The video underscored the notion that Hamas terrorism should be displayed as simply a reaction to Israel's activities. Hamas's guidelines included a series of directions stating that “anyone killed or martyred is to be called a civilian from Gaza or Palestine before we talk about his status in jihad or his military rank,” “avoid publishing pictures of rockets fired into Israel from Gaza city

⁸² Matti Friedman. “An Insider’s Guide to the Most Important Story on Earth.” Tablet, August 2014. <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/183033/israel-insider-guide>.

⁸³ Matti Friedman. “An Insider’s Guide to the Most Important Story on Earth.” Tablet, August 2014. <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/183033/israel-insider-guide>

⁸⁴ “Lessons from Israel’s Wars in Gaza,” Rand (2007) https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_briefs/RB9900/RB9975/RAND_RB9975.pdf.

⁸⁵ “Lessons from Israel’s Wars in Gaza,” Rand (2007) https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_briefs/RB9900/RB9975/RAND_RB9975.pdf.

⁸⁶ Operation Protective Edge: Hamas’s Manipulation of the Media. Retrieved by The Jewish Virtual Library. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hamas-s-manipulation-of-the-media>.

centers,” and “do not publish or share photos or video clips showing rocket launching sites or the movement of resistance in Gaza.”⁸⁷

Hamas was successful in its quest to influence public opinion through information warfare. Many of the traditional news outlets portrayed Israel in a negative light throughout the conflict. This series of negative headlines about Israel severely impacted its public image. Table 2 lists headlines for and against Operation Protective Edge.

Table 2 – TRADITIONAL MEDIA HEADLINES

During the War ⁸⁸	After the War
“Against the war: the movement that dare not speak its name in Israel,” The Guardian	“Five years after Operation Protective Edge, deterrence has been lost,” The Jerusalem Post
“Israel and Hamas Trade Attacks as Tension Rises,” The New York Times	“This is what Gaza looks like 28 days after Operation Protective Edge,” The Independent
“The U.N. says 7 in 10 Palestinians killed in Gaza were civilians. Israel disagrees,” The Washington Post	“Gaza war seen rather differently in US, UK newspapers,” The Times of Israel

⁸⁷ The Jewish Virtual Library, Operation Protective Edge: Hamas’s Manipulation of the Media. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hamas-s-manipulation-of-the-media>.

⁸⁸ JSTOR, Operation Protective Edge, 2019 <https://www.jstor.org/action/doBasicSearch?Query=operation+protective+edge>

<p>“Gaza reporters’ tweets: Hamas using human shields,” The Jerusalem Post</p> <p>“Egyptian Media Reveals How Isolated Hamas Is,” The Washington Post</p>	<p>“Israel and Gaza just saw their worst violence in years. It could get worse.” Vox</p>
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*All of these headlines found from JSTOR.

From these headlines, it is evident that the mainstream media sided more closely with Hamas than Israel. This was fueled, in part, by the fact that there was a significantly higher death toll amongst the Gazans than the Israelis. Throughout the conflict, Israel made countless efforts to deter the use of human shields, but these stories were seldom featured in the headlines. In terms of a realist foreign policy perspective, Israel knew that it needed to defend itself against Hamas, but still went to great lengths to prevent the loss of civilian lives in Gaza. Nevertheless, from a messaging perspective, Israel lost the battle because they were portrayed as heavy-handed in the media.

From the television screens to retweets of images, Americans were able to formulate foreign policy opinions based on what they saw and not just what they read.



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⁸⁹ Anna Ahronheim, "Five years after Operation Protective Edge, deterrence has been lost," The Jerusalem Post, July, 8 2019, <https://www.jpost.com/printarticle.aspx?id=594855>

⁹⁰ Dina Rickman, "This is what Gaza looks like 28 days after Operation Protective Edge," The Independent, August 5, 2014. https://www.indy100.com/article/this-is-what-gaza-looks-like-28-days-after-operation-protective-edge--lkrJNBK_zx



By showing the war as well describing it, this type of bias continued even in the months after Operation Protective Edge. For example, CNN had to issue an apology in November 2014 over the onscreen manuscript it used during its reporting of Palestinian attack on a Jerusalem synagogue.⁹²



By displaying images and crafting the media messaging, the media is playing a role in U.S. public opinion. While this image existed on the television screen, the effect of this incident was amplified through the sharing of both the originally story as well as

⁹¹ Jack Khoury. "IDF Expands Attacks on Day 2 of Operation Protective Edge." Ha'aretz. July 10, 2014. <https://www.haaretz.com/wrap-up-day-2-of-protective-edge-1.5255016>

⁹² David Caspi. "CNN Apologizes for Onscreen Text Used During Jerusalem Synagogue Attack Coverage," The Hollywood Reporter, November 19, 2014, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/cnn-apologizes-screen-text-used-750235>

the apology on social media.⁹³ Additionally, while CNN’s image was simply on the televisions screen for those watching, CBC tweeted out a very similar response – adding fire to the fuel on the Internet.



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According to Pew, the American public was split regarding Israel’s response to Operation Protective Edge. Table 3 shows the results of a Pew poll question assessing American public opinion about Israel during Operation Protective Edge.

Table 3: Has Israel gone too far in its response to Hamas during this conflict?

(Pew Research, July 28, 2014)

	Total
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⁹³ Spencer Ho. “Foreign press group rejects claims it supports terror,” The Times of Israel, November 20, 2014, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/foreign-press-group-rejects-claims-it-supports-terror/>

⁹⁴ Spencer Ho. “Foreign press group rejects claims it supports terror,” The Times of Israel, November 20, 2014, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/foreign-press-group-rejects-claims-it-supports-terror/>

Israel's response has been appropriate	35%
Israel's response has gone too far	25%
Israel has not gone far enough	15%

Source: *Pew Research Center*, "U.S. Public Has Favorable View of Israel's People, but Is Less Positive toward Its Government," April 24, 2019, <https://www.people-press.org/2019/04/24/u-s-public-has-favorable-view-of-israels-people-but-is-less-positive-toward-its-government/>

Similarly, Gallup (Table 2) found that U.S. citizens were split in their views of whether Israel's actions against the Palestinian group Hamas were "mostly justified" or "mostly unjustified," but they widely viewed Hamas' actions as mostly unjustified.

Table 4: Is your view of the following actions that they are justified or unjustified?

(Gallup, July 24, 2014)

	Justified	Unjustified	No opinion
Israel's actions against Hamas	42%	39%	20%
Hamas' actions against Israel	11%	70%	20%

Pew Research Center, "U.S. Public Has Favorable View of Israel's People, but Is Less Positive Toward Its Government," April 24, 2019, <https://www.people-press.org/2019/04/24/u-s-public-has-favorable-view-of-israels-people-but-is-less-positive-toward-its-government/>

[press.org/2019/04/24/u-s-public-has-favorable-view-of-israels-people-but-is-less-positive-toward-its-government/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2019/04/24/u-s-public-has-favorable-view-of-israels-people-but-is-less-positive-toward-its-government/)

By using both mainstream media and social media to paint itself as victims, Hamas was able to drive a wedge between Israel and the international community.⁹⁵ As a democracy which embodies similar values to the United States, the Jewish state's image was severely impacted by Hamas's ability to spearhead the conversation.

⁹⁶Through strategic communication, Hamas was able to win a small victory over the Jewish state without firing a single rocket.

Hamas did a masterful job of playing the victim, and this mastery proved helpful in painting Israel in a negative light. Throughout Hamas's various conflicts with Israel, the terrorist group discovered a valuable message: vilify Israel on the global stage. That is why one of Hamas's most successful (yet inhumane) strategies to date is its use of human shields. The terrorist organization places its citizens in harm's way in an effort to both thwart military efforts from the Israeli military and impact Israel's reputation in the world. "While the United States and the rest of the peaceful world prefer that Israel and the Palestinians in Gaza resolve their differences nonviolently, Hamas continuously chooses to conduct its attacks from mosques, schools and hospitals to kill as many innocent people on both sides people as possible," said Rep. Joe Wilson, who spearheaded U.S. legislation condemning Hamas's use of human shields.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Lt. Col. (ret.) Jonathan D. Halevi, "Hamas' Warfare Tactics in the "Great Return March," The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, April 30, 2018, <http://jcpa.org/article/hamas-warfare-tactics-in-the-great-return-march/>.

⁹⁶ Benjamin Runkle. "Preparing for Warfare's Subterranean Future." *War on the Rocks*, April 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/04/preparing-for-warfares-subterranean-future/>

⁹⁷ Joe Wilson. The Inhumanity of Human Shields. *The Washington Times*, May 31, 2018. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/may/31/the-inhumanity-of-hamas-human-shields/>.

Israel has enforced countless efforts to prevent the use of human shields. In the 2014 Gaza conflict, the Israeli military discovered several locations where Hamas launched rockets and attacks on Israel. In an effort to prevent Israel from killing its operatives and destroying its weapons arsenal, Hamas placed civilians in these locations. According to the New York Post, “Israel repeatedly explained why it was firing on schools (and mosques and hospitals) where Palestinians had taken refuge. Because Hamas, desperate to win world sympathy by any means, has always been happy to use Palestinian innocents as human shields—the more casualties, the better.”⁹⁸

Israel used counter measures such as dropping leaflets and knocking on the roof to warn of incoming military action. “The Israelis have used such telephone calls and leaflets for years now, in a stated effort to reduce civilian casualties and avoid charges of indiscriminate killings or even of crimes against the rules of war.”⁹⁹ However, Hamas would incentivize the civilians to stay in place despite the numerous Israeli warnings. By forcing blood on Israel’s hands, Hamas succeeded in being portrayed as the victim rather than the aggressor.

Even though the Israelis took many precautions against Hamas, the overwhelming death toll of Palestinian citizens resulted in bad publicity for the Israelis. Since many journalists continue to view the death toll as black and white, some of the reporting continues to fall into Hamas’s trap. Additionally, since there is a lack of understanding regarding the full conflict, Americans often receive only part of the story.

⁹⁸ Editorial, “U.N. report outlines how Hamas used kids as human shields,” *The New York Post*, May 31, 2018. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/may/31/the-inhumanity-of-hamas-human-shields/>.

⁹⁹ Steven Erlanger and Fares Akram, “Israel Warns Gaza Targets by Phone and Leaflet,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/09/world/middleeast/by-phone-and-leaflet-israeli-attackers-warn-gazans.html>.

“To make sense of most international journalism from Israel, it is important first to understand that the news tells us far less about Israel than about the people writing the news.”¹⁰⁰

When Israel initially entered into the war, 42 percent of Americans believed that the operation was justified, compared with 38 percent who thought the operation was not justified. According to a Gallup poll, seven in ten Americans continued to view Israel favorably following Operation Protective Edge. “After nearly a month, however, the media has belatedly cottoned to the Hamas game. Over the last week *The New York Times*, *Al Jazeera* and the *BBC*—none of them traditional redoubts of Zionist fervor – have begun casting doubt on their own previously reported statistics.”

Comparing U.S. public opinion about Israel during the Six Day War vs. Operation Protective Edge, it is clear that changes in the media in recent years have impacted American public opinion regarding Israel. Not only did the mainstream media portray Israel in a negative light during Operation Protective Edge, but also, social media played a significant role in framing the conflict. With the rise of social media in the past decade, the American public was able to receive information on the conflict based on their media preferences. Therefore, while there were some positive headlines portraying the Gaza War, many people did not read them because they were spoiled for choice in terms of the news they chose to read. Additionally, with social media at an all-time high, people were able to view constant images coming out of the Gaza War. With the disproportionate number of casualties in Gaza compared to Israel, it was easier for

¹⁰⁰ Matti Friedman. “An Insider’s Guide to the Most Important Story on Earth.” *Tablet*, August 2014. <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/183033/israel-insider-guide>.

American's foreign policy opinion to be more sympathetic toward the Gazan side than in previous wars.

According to a Pew poll, 60 percent of Republicans blamed Hamas as most responsible for the violence in the 2014 conflict. On the other hand, Democrats were divided as "29 percent say Hamas is more responsible, 26 percent are with Israel, while 18 percent volunteer that both sides are responsible."¹⁰¹ Moreover, Democrats and Republicans also starkly differ on how far Israel's actions have gone – with Democrats believing they have gone too far and Republicans viewing them as not far enough.¹⁰² By analyzing the differences in the two parties regarding public opinion and analyzing the news headlines, there is an evident correlation between where people received their news and how they formed their opinions about Israel. With news aggregates and the rise of social media, it is now possible to view only those news sources that honor one's personal preferences. Because of this partisan divide and the dissemination of media, there were more partisan swings on U.S. perceptions of Israel during Operation Protective Edge compared to the Six Day War.

How Images and Partisan Media Impacted the March of Return

From 1948 to the present-day, Israel continues to hold a favorable view in U.S. public opinion. However, the United States sees the world differently than the Middle Eastern countries like Israel, and these stark differences could impact U.S. public opinion. Israel holds a realist foreign policy in which it needs to survive at all costs. This

¹⁰¹ Pew Research Center, "Hamas Seen as More to Blame Than Israel for Current Violence," July 28, 2014, <https://www.people-press.org/2014/07/28/hamas-seen-as-more-to-blame-than-israel-for-current-violence/>.

¹⁰² Pew Research Center, "Hamas Seen as More to Blame Than Israel for Current Violence."

need to survive has impacted U.S. public opinion as it takes on Hamas and other terrorist threats mounting on its borders. However, as partisanship increases in this arena, the role of the media has become increasingly impactful. Because there are more opportunities for Americans to pick and choose where they receive their news, partisan divides may slowly impact U.S. perceptions of Israel moving forward.

For more than 30 years, presidential administrations have stood by U.S. security assistance to Israel, helping the Jewish state counter and defeat a large variety of threats on its borders. By allowing Israel's defense needs to transcend party lines, the United States ensures that Israel can defend itself, by itself. The rise of partisan politics has also begun to shift the dynamic of the U.S.-Israel relationship. With both political parties pinned up against each other, I would like to explore how partisan politics can affect foreign policy strategy and public opinion. ¹⁰³

Even in hyper-partisan times, one of the key identifiers regarding why Americans still support the Jewish state lies in the fact that Israel has largely remained bipartisan. "The question of whether Israel is or is not an asset to the United States is one we rarely bother to ask ourselves. Time and again, we see prominent Americans—presidents of the United States at the forefront—emphasizing their special relationship with Israel," wrote Kramer. ¹⁰⁴

Domestically, with the election of President Trump, Pew has determined that the partisan divide regarding Middle East sympathies has increased in the new presidential age. In a Pew Report in January 2018, 79 percent of Republicans admitted that they

¹⁰³ Martin Kramer, "The American Interest," *Azure*, no. 26 (June 2006) 21-33.

¹⁰⁴ Martin Kramer, "The American Interest," *Azure*, no. 26 (June 2006) 21-33.

sympathized more with Israel than the Palestinians, compared with just 27 percent of Democrats. “Since 2001, the share of Republicans sympathizing more with Israel than the Palestinians has increased 29 percentage points, from 50 percent to 79 percent. Over the same period, the share of Democrats saying this has declined 11 points, from 38 percent to 27 percent.”

However, as partisan politics continues to dominate, the U.S.-Israel relationship may also turn into an increasingly polarized issue. According to a 2019 Pew Research Center study, U.S. citizens generally hold a favorable opinion of the Israeli people. Yet, fewer than half have a favorable view of the Israeli government, and a larger number of Americans hold an unfavorable opinion of the Israeli government.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, there is also a largely partisan finding with most Republicans believing that the current president has the right balance, whereas Democrats are lukewarm. “An important warning light is a trend whereby Israel finds itself at the hub of the inter-party political controversy in American society. As regards subjects relating to Israeli policy – the Iranian issue and the Palestinian issue – there is a gap between Republicans and Democrats, and this phenomenon has been exacerbated over the past two years.”¹⁰⁶

This survey can be interpreted using the RAS framework. People base their conclusions of American-Israeli policy on their political biases, preconceived notions and access to information directly from the elite. Therefore, I have come to the

¹⁰⁵ Pew Research Center, “U.S. Public Has Favorable View of Israel’s People, but Is Less Positive Toward Its Government,” April 24, 2019, <https://www.people-press.org/2019/04/24/u-s-public-has-favorable-view-of-israels-people-but-is-less-positive-toward-its-government/>.

¹⁰⁶ Avner Golov, “Trump Administration Policy and American Public Opinion: Implications for Israel,” The Institute for National Security Studies INSS Insight No. 1024 (February 2018).

conclusion that the United States needs to foster its relationship with key allies in the region such as Israel to combat partisan differences.

Since March 30, 2018, the March of Return has dominated the headlines. Advertised as a “peaceful protest” in response to the U.S. Embassy move to Jerusalem, the movement has turned into a violent revolt against Israel. Over the past few months, Hamas protestors have conducted shooting attacks, explosive charges, firebombs, catapults, burning tires, dropping burning objects from the air and sabotaging the border fence.

“The Great Return March is the Hamas codename for its campaign that is striking against Israel’s existence. The campaign includes assemblies, demonstrations, and violent weekly disturbances against public order in several locations along the border fence between the Hamas-ruled Gaza and Israel. Attempts are being made to tear down the fences to enable infiltration into Israel.”¹⁰⁷ An online Hamas guideline showcased maps to Israeli communities and instructed: “Bring a knife, a dagger or a gun. ...keep it under your clothes...kidnap Israeli civilians and transfer them immediately to Hamas.”¹⁰⁸

However, similar to Operation Protective Edge, the media coverage featured the Hamas narrative. Newspaper headlines from around the world created the impression the Israeli military was shooting peaceful protestors rather than rioters and terrorists.

¹⁰⁷ Lt. Col. (ret.) Jonathan D. Halevi, “Hamas’ Warfare Tactics in the “Great Return March,” The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, April 30, 2018, <http://jcpa.org/article/hamas-warfare-tactics-in-the-great-return-march/>.

¹⁰⁸ Itamar Marcus and Nan Jacques Zilberdik, “On Facebook: Gazan protestors ‘bring a knife, dagger, handgun,’ kidnap Israelis, murder soldiers,” The Jewish News Syndicate, May 16, 2018, <https://www.jns.org/bring-a-knife-dagger-or-handgun-kidnap-israeli-civilians-and-murder-soldiers-and-settlers-instructions-on-facebook-to-gazans-for-march-of-return/>.

For example, “a New York Times headline read, ‘Israeli military kills 15 Palestinians in Confrontations at Gaza Border.’ Reuters went with ‘Israeli forces kill 16 Palestinians in Gaza border protests: Gaza medics.’ The Los Angeles Times reported: ‘15 Palestinians reported killed by Israeli fire as Gaza border protest builds.’ CNN ran with ‘Gaza protests: 17 Palestinians killed in confrontations with Israeli forces.’”¹⁰⁹ Moreover, with images impacting the news cycles and social media highways, it is now possible to skew data based on imaging. For example, during the March of Return, Hamas used human shields to infiltrate the border. Moreover, Hamas provided incentives for others to try to cross into enemy territory. Similar to Operation Protective Edge, imaging from both mainstream news outlets and social media played a role in public opinion. These images showcased a split screen of the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem established on one side and the Gaza protests on the other side.¹¹⁰



¹⁰⁹ The Jewish Virtual Library, “The Great March of Return March,”
<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/march-of-return>

¹¹⁰ David M. Halbfinger, Isabel Kershner and Declan Walsh. “Israel Kills Dozens at Gaza Border as U.S. Embassy Opens in Jerusalem,” The New York Times, May 14, 2018,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/14/world/middleeast/gaza-protests-palestinians-us-embassy.html>

With Israeli towns only minutes from the fence, Israel argues that it is taking preventive measures to thwart attacks on its civilian population. However, due to the disproportionate number of Palestinians killed in these protests, the Jewish state's image has been severely impacted on the world stage. Since this demonstration began, 132 Palestinians have been killed and over 13,000 have been injured. While this number is quite large, the protestors have been attempting to infiltrate the border – a serious Israeli red line. As the media paints this narrative and partisanship continues to split American citizens' perceptions of Israel, my policy recommendation to the Jewish state is to message itself in a bipartisan manner. By appealing to both Republicans and Democrats through the media, Israel will best preserve its public image.

By analyzing both the media and public opinion polls, it is evident that there is a correlation between the news sources and how Americans view Israel. Each of these case studies demonstrate that when people have partisan media options, their opinions of Israel are influenced by the news they read.

Chapter 1 Conclusion

Looking at the U.S.-Israel relationship, as headlines from the right and left shape Americans' sentiments of the situation, foreign policy opinion is often created through the bias of partisan media and not simply the facts on the ground. These partisan views shared over the Internet play a major role in how the American public interpret global events. Additionally, as social media continues to rise, it becomes abundantly clear that Republicans and Democrats are going to be receiving and reading different types of news based on their own political preferences. Because of this, U.S. public opinion and

the role of the media have changed significantly in the 21st Century. Public opinion on foreign policy is becoming more and more divided as Americans stick to partisan news rather than selecting diverse news options.

As the media continues to transform, Americans often look to their news sources to help interpret how they view Israel. With the rise of the Internet, the media is able to spread their message quicker and Americans have more access to different types of messaging. During the Six Day War, the headlines I spotlighted all greatly mirrored each other – with the public’s opinion generally following suit based on the poll numbers. With the abundance of modern day choices regarding news websites, social media pages and partisan news, U.S. citizens have an increasing array of options impacting how they interpret the news and form opinions on issues and events.

Chapter Two: How Social Media Mobilizes Global Movements

In the dictionary, media is defined as “a medium of cultivation, conveyance or expression.”¹¹¹ Colloquially, U.S. citizens often refer to the media as newsmakers. From television to Facebook, newspapers to Twitter, the media keeps us on top of stories around the globe and provides a window into foreign policy. While reporters have kept the public well informed on international and domestic affairs for many generations, the recent rise of the Internet and social media has changed the face of news dissemination and consumption. With the advent and proliferation of social media, everyone has the tools at their fingertips to broadcast their views, opinions and news across the World Wide Web.¹¹² Now, with the touch of a button, we can receive breaking news updates from anywhere in the world.

According to Tufts University, social media “refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks.”¹¹³ In today’s society, social media is a major source of online news content. There are more than 2.4 billion internet consumers worldwide, and approximately 64.5 percent of those consumers obtain their news updates from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram over traditional media.¹¹⁴ With

¹¹¹ “Media,” Merriam-Webster, last modified November 1, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/media>.

¹¹² Yochai Benkler and Helen Nissenbaum. *Commons-based Peer Production and Virtue*. New York: The Journal of Political Philosophy, 2006. Print.

¹¹³ “Social Media Overview,” Tufts University, last modified December 11, 2019, <https://communications.tufts.edu/marketing-and-branding/social-media-overview/>.

¹¹⁴ Martin, “Social Media.”

this large audience, social media has reinvented how the world connects and serves as a strong tool for political communication.

While the first chapter focused on how the Internet helps U.S. citizens interpret Middle East foreign policy, this chapter will focus on how social media can shape and influence world events. Underpinning the case study is the role of social media in transforming the way political opinions are formed and information is spread. The Arab Spring section examines how social media has opened up new avenues for citizen journalism and bloggers.

The Arab Spring was a masterclass in how the Middle East utilized social media to impact policy changes and mobilize widespread movements. During this time period, social media exploded on the scene in three important ways. First and foremost, traditional news outlets, cognizant of the fact that the virtual world contains a vast audience, began increasingly using social media to propel their own content. In a recent MIT survey, 50 percent of Internet users interviewed declared that they read the latest news via social media before turning to mainstream media for a deeper dive.¹¹⁵ One of the biggest changes that social media has brought to the table is the overdrive of information.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, Sinan Aral, "The spread of true and false news online," *Science*, Vol. 359 (March 2018): 1146-1151.

¹¹⁶ Parsons, Patrick R. *Blue Skies: A History of Cable Television*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008. Print.

According to a recent MIT Study¹¹⁷, 43 percent of U.S. adults receive their news from Facebook, 21 percent from YouTube, and 12 percent from Twitter. Moreover, thanks to social media, journalists have closer and unparalleled access to their readers and viewers.¹¹⁸ Therefore, many viewers go directly from social media sites to traditional news outlets to learn more about stories of interest. According to MIT, there has been a 57 percent increase in traffic to news sites referred from social media.¹¹⁹ However, this rapid spread of information also has drawbacks because the time spent reading an article via traditional media sources has significantly decreased. For instance, “an average visitor will only read an article for 15 seconds or less and the average video watch time online is 10 seconds.”¹²⁰ This reduction in time devoted to reading news articles due to information overload hinders readers’ abilities to fully digest and comprehend the information at large.

The second way social media has flourished is through the proliferation of individual bloggers. As social media spreads, unknown bloggers and entities have the ability to be seen in ways unlike ever before. From social media aggregators to viral content producers, activists and journalists, the rapidly growing Internet edge facilitates the spread of information at lightning speed.

¹¹⁷ Martin, “Social Media.”

¹¹⁸ Jessica Lawlor, “The effects of social media on journalism” *Muckrack*, March 14, 2018, <https://muckrack.com/blog/2018/03/14/the-effects-of-social-media-on-journalism>

¹¹⁹ Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, Sinan Aral, “The spread of true and false news online,” *Science*, Vol. 359 (March 2018): 1146-1151.

¹²⁰ Martin, “Social Media.”

Lastly, government officials, interest groups and think tanks use social media to propel their messages.¹²¹ From tweeting press releases to sharing analysis on core issues, these entities are reaching the American public faster than ever before. While this explosion of online expertise could be viewed as positive, there may be negative implications regarding how the elite communicate and how that communication impacts foreign policy. Furthermore, public perception in foreign affairs is turning more partisan because political leaders have the means to address their bases directly. “For politicians, the adoption of internet communication has followed an uneven pattern, whether digital platforms are used for engaging with their electorate and with issues, or for simply broadcasting their press releases and speeches.”¹²²

While social media is a great tool for delivering fast information, there are stark differences between the media world and reality.¹²³ From reported misinformation to social media ad spending, often what is spread online blurs the lines between reality and fiction.¹²⁴ Moreover, there are a multitude of questions regarding what is actually occurring in the online universe. Are the articles being shared making an impact? Does the information shared impact social media participants and users? Is social media making a direct impact on the world or is its influence overblown? In this chapter, I will examine how citizens, activists, news stations and politicians use social media to reach, inform and influence the public perception of the Arab Spring.

¹²¹ Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*. (Basic Books, 2002).

¹²² Tim Highfield. *Social Media and Everyday Politics* (Polity Press, 2010), 113.

¹²³ John Sides. *Campaigns & Elections: Rules, Reality, Strategy, Choice*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012.

¹²⁴ John Sides, Michael Tessler and Lynn Vavreck, *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America*, (Princeton University Press, 2018).

The Arab Spring ushered in a new wave of citizen journalism and social media usage in the Middle East.¹²⁵ The event was a sequence of pro-democracy uprisings that took place in a number of largely Muslim countries, including Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Bahrain in the spring of 2011. Four major Middle East dictators—Zine el Abadine Ben Ali of Tunisia, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen, and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt—lost their regimes as a result of these social protests after decades in power. Throughout these widespread protests, individuals used social media as a tool to record demonstrations on the street and broadcast them to the world via mobile phones.

During the Arab Spring, the Middle East¹²⁶ governments lost control of the messaging because the young protestors learned how to spread their messages through the Internet.¹²⁷ Moreover, the Internet allowed anti-government groups to connect virtually through Facebook and other social media platforms to enhance their movement. With various smaller groups uniting online to join the larger Arab Spring uprising, the Internet played a role in growing the movement and initiating regime change.

By broadcasting from social media platforms, activists, journalists and citizens could fully capture the anti-regime protests as well as the events on the ground.¹²⁸ The internet, smart phones, and social networking applications gave protesters a larger

¹²⁵ Mohamed Nanabhay and Roxanne Farmanfarmaian. *From spectacle to spectacular: How physical space, social media and mainstream broadcast amplified the public sphere in Egypt's 'Revolution'*, (Journal of North African Studies, 2011), 1-4.

¹²⁶ Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain. *Democracy's Fourth Wave*, (Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

¹²⁷ Mohamed Nanabhay and Roxanne Farmanfarmaian. "From spectacle to spectacular," 1-4.

¹²⁸ Damian Ratcliffe. "How has social media changed in the Middle East since the Arab Spring?" *BBC, March 14, 2017*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/academy/entries/af5cd5be-303e-4ab9-bf80-10c8c4f012cd>

platform to voice their opinions.¹²⁹ “Empowered by access to social media sites like Twitter, YouTube and Facebook, protesters organized across the Middle East. The Arab Spring commenced in December 2010 in Tunisia and spread throughout the region.”¹³⁰ Political commentators in the United States and other Western societies commended these pro-democracy efforts after observing the movement on social media.¹³¹ Some analysts even referred to the Arab Spring as the “Facebook Revolution,” due to the fact that images of the events were unfolding in real time on social media.¹³² Before long, the term “spectacle to spectacular” was coined after Egypt shut down the Internet to prevent citizen journalism.¹³³ Moreover, while western societies created social media, the Middle East was able to leverage the tool and virtually change their reality.

Local and global actors alike learned to leverage social media during the Arab Spring to propel their movements.¹³⁴ These real-time, on-the-ground outlooks on the Arab Spring would have been much harder to capture prior to the social media age.¹³⁵ Despite the regimes’ attempts to contain the social media proliferation, the citizen journalists continued their on-the-ground reporting, from posting blog photos to interviewing protesters.

¹²⁹ Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain. “Democracy’s Fourth Wave,” 4.

¹³⁰ Jessi Hempel. “Social Media Made the Arab Spring, But Couldn’t Save It” *The Wired*, January 26, 2016. <https://www.wired.com/2016/01/social-media-made-the-arab-spring-but-couldnt-save-it/>

¹³¹ Constance Duncombe, Twitter and transformative diplomacy: social media and Iran–US relations, *International Affairs*, Volume 93, Issue 3, May 2017, Pages 545–562, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix048>

¹³² Russell A. Berman. *Social Media, New Technologies and the Middle East*. The Hoover Institution, June 6, 2017.

¹³³ Mohamed Nanabhay and Roxanne Farmanfarman. “From spectacle to spectacular,” 1-4.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Pp 1-4.

¹³⁵ Ibid. Pp 1-4.

Moreover, the Arab Spring ignited the “smart phone to social media” phenomenon that permitted journalists to quickly capture information on cell phones and then share it via social media platforms.¹³⁶ From citizen arrests to covering the news with a cell phone, the “blogger sphere” opened up new avenues for new types of media.¹³⁷ “A cottage industry of bloggers and activists took to the internet to produce alternative newscasts, create virtual spaces for anonymous conversations about public policy, and commiserate about state persecution.”¹³⁸ With citizen journalism transporting us to the center of the action through social media, the Arab Spring reached countless people worldwide.

Quickly, the mainstream media took notice and reported on how the usage of phone and mobile devices directly limited authoritarian regimes’ power to control the people.¹³⁹ By watching this mobilization play out on their computer screens, U.S. citizens had a front row seat to a mega movement in the Middle East.

“That signal was being watched by over 12,000 people at that time. Gone are the days when governments will be able to hide their crimes by prohibiting TV stations and journalists from being on the scene. Everyone on the scene is a citizen journalist, and everyone is documenting while protesting,” said Dr. Rasha Abdulla, associate professor

¹³⁶ David Batty. “Arab spring leads surge in events captured on cameraphones” *The Guardian*, December 29, 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/29/arab-spring-captured-on-cameraphones>

¹³⁷Tim Highfield. “Social Media and Everyday Politics,” 69.

¹³⁸Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain. “Democracy’s Fourth Wave,” 19.

¹³⁹ Mohamed Nanabhay and Roxanne Farmanfarman. “From spectacle to spectacular,” 1-4.

and chair of journalism and mass communication at the American University in Cairo.

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The Arab Spring's citizen journalism caught the eye of mainstream media, with news outlets asking citizens to provide them with footage. Before long, *The New York Times* and *NPR* published eyewitness accounts from citizen blogs on their online websites and social media pages.¹⁴¹ With new partnerships on the horizon, the mainstream media used citizen content because they found it cheaper, unbiased, and unedited, and believed it often provided the most accurate representation of the crowds and what was actually occurring. The Arab Spring, consequently, became the age of the blogger.¹⁴² By following these events through citizen bloggers and live streams, U.S. citizens could observe exactly what was happening in countries that many of them had never stepped foot in.

While the blogger sphere opened up new opportunities for young journalists, it also came with its setbacks. For instance, there was such a wealth of information floating around the Internet that some of the information appeared skewed or misleading.¹⁴³ As 35,000 plus bloggers¹⁴⁴ reported on the Arab Spring, there was a large amount of false reporting, inaccurate sources and hidden agendas. Furthermore,

¹⁴⁰ David Batty. "Arab spring leads surge in events captured on cameraphones" *The Guardian*, December 29, 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/29/arab-spring-captured-on-cameraphones>

¹⁴¹ Alfred Hermida, Seth C. Lewis, Rodrigo Zamith, Sourcing the Arab Spring: A Case Study of Andy Carvin's Sources on Twitter during the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Volume 19, Issue 3, 1 April 2014, Pages 479–499, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12074>

¹⁴² Tim Highfield. "Social Media and Everyday Politics," 68.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* Pp 71.

¹⁴⁴ Bilal Lakhani. "A Look at the Arab Blogosphere" *BBC*, June 1, 2011. https://archives.cjr.org/behind_the_news/a_look_at_the_arab_blogosphere.php

bloggers often present a more biased view of a situation at large – often reporting on their own opinions of a situation such as the Arab Spring rather than on basic facts.¹⁴⁵

“For example, banned political parties, such as Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, had relied on bloggers who maintained servers located outside the country and thereby could not be taken offline by the government.”¹⁴⁶ Egypt, in particular, had a number of political parties that used blogging and the Internet to communicate with their supporters.¹⁴⁷

These problems of objectivity and inaccuracy occurred within the mainstream media as well.¹⁴⁸ For instance, in the case of NPR Senior Strategist Andy Carvin, his coverage of the Arab Spring on Twitter contained hundreds of tweets per day for hours on end. Carvin transformed his Twitter feed into an exclusive newswire regarding the changes taking place in the Arab world. His feed became famous for painting a real-time picture of the events occurring in the Middle East. While his coverage was praised as a “living, breathing real-time verification system” and a “must-read newswire,”¹⁴⁹ his thousands of tweets a day were not always fully accurate. Even he has admitted gaps in

¹⁴⁵ Jane Singer, “The political j-blogger,” *Sage Publications*. no. 6(2): 173–198.

¹⁴⁶ Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain. “Democracy’s Fourth Wave,” 38.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Pp 38.

¹⁴⁸ Alfred Hermida, Seth C. Lewis, Rodrigo Zamith, Sourcing the Arab Spring: A Case Study of Andy Carvin’s Sources on Twitter during the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Volume 19, Issue 3, April 2014, Pages 479–499, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12074>

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

his reporting style, stating that “I’d love for these sources to be more accurate and to not have us wasting each other’s time.”¹⁵⁰

This notion of live-time yet flawed reporting changed the game because social media provided an avenue for inaccurate or unverified information to appear on traditional news outlets. Prior to the social media and Internet age, newspapers would tirelessly fact check articles before sending them to print. Since social media promotes breaking news updates, there are myriad opportunities for false information to spread like wildfire. This poses substantial problems because it is challenging to contain the spread of misinformation and difficult to retract false reports once they are read by the public. Therefore, while the rapid Internet news feeds that were established during the Arab Spring changed the face of journalism forever, it also posed a serious threat to accurate reporting in the digital media age.

Who Was The Target Demographic of the Social Media Mobilization?

During the Arab Spring, traditional media zoomed in on young protesters mobilizing in the streets in an effort to topple dictatorial regimes. Using the Internet as their chosen platform, young protesters took advantage of the Internet to help spread information about their cause. However, there was an evident societal divide in the Middle East regarding access to the Internet in the Middle East. While traditional media sources often forget to tell this story, it was largely well-educated individuals that lead

¹⁵⁰ Craig Silverman. “Is this the world's best Twitter account?” *Columbia Journalism Review*. April 8, 2011. http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/is_this_the_worlds_best_twitter_account.php

the Arab Spring movement — with less-educated individuals disconnected from the Internet craze.

According to a 2012 Pew Research study, nearly two-thirds of the entire population in Egypt did not utilize the internet.¹⁵¹ Moreover, the study found that the college educated demographic uses the Internet to acquire political updates more than any other sector of Egypt's population.¹⁵² The study also showcased that while large populations in the Middle East are still mostly disconnected from the Internet, the college educated group used online platforms to receive their news and political updates. This demographic significantly relief on the Internet to access information more than traditional media sources including print newspapers and television.¹⁵³ This finding showcases how the Arab uprisings came to fruition. The college educated protestors used the Internet to gain access to information and was thus inspired to join the widespread protests. Even though large parts of the Middle East did not have access to online content, the social media mobilized and targeted the right demographic to build the large-scale movement. By turning their attention away from traditional media sources and shining a spotlight on social media, the Arab Spring organizers attracted the right audience to build a movement.

¹⁵¹ *Pew Research Center*, "The Role of Social Media in the Arab Uprisings," November 28, 2012, <https://www.journalism.org/2012/11/28/role-social-media-arab-uprisings/>.

¹⁵² Ibid

¹⁵³ Ibid

How Has Social Media Changed in the Middle East in the Years Since the Arab Spring?

As one of the first political uprisings to erupt during the social media age, the Arab Spring not only captured the spirit of the protests in the Middle East, but it also inspired a social media revolution showcasing protests worldwide.¹⁵⁴ According to a University of Washington study, social media played a major role in shaping political discourse during the Arab Spring.¹⁵⁵ “Social media carried a cascade of messages about freedom and democracy across North Africa and the Middle East, and helped raise expectations for the success of political uprising,” said the report lead and University of Washington Professor Philip Howard. “People who shared an interest in democracy built extensive social networks and organized political action. Social media became a critical part of the toolkit for greater freedom.”¹⁵⁶ According to a *Foreign Policy* article, “Internet optimists also argue that online venues create space for dialogue in the midst of conflict, presenting policy options to the public and to elites in spite of government censorship. And, of course, the internet allows activists to promote their own narrative, which is particularly important when the mainstream media is controlled by the government.”¹⁵⁷

By using this new form of media, the Arab Spring propelled media, journalism and communication to a whole new level. This type of journalism inspired a well-known

¹⁵⁴ Catherine O'Donnell. “New study quantifies use of social media in Arab Spring.” *University of Washington News*, September 12, 2011 <https://www.washington.edu/news/2011/09/12/new-study-quantifies-use-of-social-media-in-arab-spring/>

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Peter Suci, “Does Social Media Make the Political Divide Worse” *Forbes*, October 30, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/petersuci/2019/10/30/does-social-media-make-the-political-divide-worse/#48b917a26e3a>

Saudi Arabian political activist turned journalist named Jamal Khashoggi – who reported largely for U.S. audiences. Inspired by the Arab Spring, Khashoggi used his reporter status to challenge the status quo in Saudi Arabia. The eventual assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, ostensibly with the consent of the Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, showcased how the Arab nations feared his outspoken nature in the digital age.

Through his social media outlets and traditional news platform as a *Washington Post* columnist, Khashoggi was able to broadcast his views on the Middle East to the western world. For instance, he wrote extensively on the importance of democracy in the Middle East and often cited the Arab Spring as a point of reference.

Moreover, he penned *Washington Post* stories that criticized Saudi Arabia and praised the efforts made by protesters throughout this time period. Even though he was living in the Middle East, he was able to write for Western audiences and used his social media platforms to recirculate his pieces through cyberspace. For example, in his article “Why the Arab World Needs Democracy Now?”¹⁵⁸ he analyzed why the Arab nations need democratic reforms and how the Arab World is losing. “People are losing hope in democracy because of the failure of the Arab Spring revolts. They’re afraid of ending up like Syria. Many Arab regimes, their television networks, their writers, their commentators, are trying to scare people off democracy by actively promoting this idea.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Jamal Khashoggi, " Why the Arab World Needs Democracy Now?" *The Washington Post*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/22/opinion/khashoggi-mbs-arab-democracy.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

By posting and retweeting articles like these online, he was able to reach a large number of people and showcase the problems within the Saudi government. Since 2017, he used his voice to pen a monthly *Washington Post* column in which he criticized the policies of MBS. After viewing how the Arab Spring ignited protests through social media platforms, his candid rhetoric online likely sparked fear within Saudi Arabia's leaders.

Because Khashoggi was able to spread his articles quickly online, he became a threat to the Saudi government's carefully crafted new image. "MBS would like to advance a new narrative for my country's recent history, one that absolves the government of any complicity in the adoption of strict Wahhabi doctrine. That simply isn't the case. And while MBS is right to free Saudi Arabia from ultra-conservative religious forces, he is wrong to advance a new radicalism that, while seemingly more liberal and appealing to the West, is just as intolerant of dissent," wrote Khashoggi in a *Washington Post* column.¹⁶⁰ Similar to the bloggers who were picked up by major news outlets to report on the Arab Spring, Khashoggi was picked up by *The Washington Post* because he provided an inside view of the events on the ground.

Saudi Arabia's call to kill Khashoggi ultimately backfired as the Internet scoured for answers behind his untimely death. Moreover, many commentators compared the murder mystery of his death to the famous suicide by fire that sparked the Arab Spring. "There is a direct line between the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi – whose death

¹⁶⁰ Jamal Khashoggi, "By blaming 1979 for Saudi Arabia's problems, the crown prince is peddling revisionist history," *The Washington Post*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/22/opinion/khashoggi-mbs-arab-democracy.html>.

was the spark that lit the Arab spring against autocracy – and the killing of Khashoggi.”¹⁶¹

His murder demonstrates the fear that Arab nations have regarding the rise of new media in the Internet age. “I think Jamal became threatening because of his connections, his networks of acquaintances, his international appeal and the fact that that he went back and forth and published in foreign outlets, appeared in international television and spoke his mind,” said Khalil Jahshan, executive director of the Arab Center in Washington, D.C.¹⁶² Since his articles from *The Washington Post* were spread online, he was able to reach Western crowds with his Saudi criticism. Consequently, the murder of Khashoggi ended up garnering an even bigger social media imprint as the Western world demanded justice for the slain journalist.

Chapter Two Conclusion

By sharing information via websites such as Facebook and Twitter during the Arab Spring, protesters broadcasted their discontent with the authoritarian regimes and provided the Internet with unprecedented insights into their world. In the years since the Arab Spring, social media in the Middle East has become more popular and expanded to a far greater audience than ever before.

¹⁶¹ Jamal Khashoggi, "Why the Arab World Needs Democracy Now?" *The Washington Post*, April 3, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/04/03/by-blaming-1979-for-saudi-arabias-problems-the-crown-prince-is-peddling-revisionist-history/>

¹⁶² Gabriela Martinez, "Why did Saudi Arabia want to silence Jamal Khashoggi?" *PBS News Hour*, October 19, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/why-did-saudi-arabia-want-to-silence-jamal-khashoggi>

For instance, the number of Facebook users in the Middle East has tripled since 2012 due to the media blitz of the Arab Spring as well as the proliferation of smartphones.¹⁶³ According to the World Economic Forum, the Arab Spring has changed the virtual landscape of the Middle East, with 80 million Facebook users in the region, global leader status in online videos and massive Twitter popularity among the region's 18-24 year olds.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, in a recent Pew Study, overall 40 percent of Facebook users in the Middle East receive their news from Facebook.¹⁶⁵

One unintended consequence of the Arab Spring is that now Middle East regimes better understand how to use social media against its citizens.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, while citizens actively participate in social media, they also worry about privacy concerns, particularly from the government.¹⁶⁷ "The social media scene in the Middle East, as elsewhere, has continued to change and evolve since 2011. Many users are more conscious about managing their online privacy, whilst they display a voracious appetite for consuming social video and visually-led social content. Recognizing and adapting to these changes should be at the heart of any social media strategy for the Middle East for some time to come."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Ratcliffe, "Arab Spring."

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Everette Dannis and Robb Wood. "Media in the Middle East: A new study shows how the Arab world gets and shares digital news" *Neiman Lab*, September 19, 2017, <https://www.niemanlab.org/2017/09/media-in-the-middle-east-a-new-study-shows-how-the-arab-world-gets-and-shares-digital-news/>

¹⁶⁶ Ratcliffe, "Arab Spring."

¹⁶⁷ Caroline Caywood. "This Is How Social Media Is Being Used in the Middle East." *The National Interest*, November 21, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/how-social-media-being-used-middle-east-36857>

¹⁶⁸ Ratcliffe, "Arab Spring."

The Arab Spring protesters taught their leaders how to leverage the Internet to promote a mission or idea. This social media strategy would become particularly useful to the Iranian regime as they negotiated with the P5+1 on a future nuclear accord. In the next chapter, I will address the major role that social media played in the formulation, implementation and U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear accord.

Chapter Three: How Social Media Bridges the Gap between Policymakers and the Public

While the Arab Spring showcased how social media can topple regimes, the conflict surrounding the Iran deal exemplifies how government officials from the United States, Iran and the international community shape the narrative on major global decisions. This chapter centers on how politicians and activist groups utilize the social media as an avenue to promote their policy objectives. From the deal's implementation to its current state of jeopardy, social media has been there every step of the way to document and inform the American public on the latest developments between Iran and the P5+1. Moreover, the Iranian regime utilized social media to enhance their diplomatic efforts and alter their political image online.

The past several years has witnessed radical shifts in U.S. policy on Iran, most markedly in regard to the Iran nuclear accord. From analyzing the flaws of the JCPOA to criticizing President Trump's decision to withdraw from the accord, the media has provided a front row seat to the political drama surrounding Iran. "Given the difficulties of high-level diplomatic interaction between Iran and the United States since the severing of diplomatic ties in 1980, social media has become a significant platform on which diplomats can communicate. Social media are thus changing the space within which diplomacy unfolds."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Duncombe, "Twitter," 545–562.

From activist groups to presidents, members of Congress to the United Nations, the world has voraciously watched a major policy debate play out on the World Wide Web. In less than a five-year time frame, the United States and Iran have gone from reaching a diplomatic milestone to whispering about the threat of war. Through the lens of social media, this section will analyze how U.S. policies toward Iran were portrayed regarding the JCPOA and how social media influenced America's view of the JCPOA. Social media has played an ever-increasing role in framing the showdown, with U.S.-Iran policy making its way into many hashtags.

While the majority of Democrats hailed the JCPOA as a foreign policy success, Republicans painted the nuclear accord as a foreign policy nightmare that ultimately could hand Iran a nuclear weapon.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, President Donald Trump made a campaign promise to withdraw from the JCPOA if he was elected to the White House. In May 2018, President Trump fulfilled the promise and withdrew the United States from the global accord.¹⁷¹ Since then, he has imposed a maximum pressure campaign on the Iranians that has severely impacted Iran's economy.¹⁷² In 2019, U.S.-Iran tensions

¹⁷⁰ Emma Borden and Suzanne Maloney, "Will the Iran nuclear deal survive? Time, and sanctions, will tell," *The Brookings Institution*, May 30, 2017, www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/05/30/will-the-iran-nuclear-deal-survive-time-and-sanctions-will-tell/.

¹⁷¹ Mark Landler, "Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scored," *The New York Times*, May 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/world/middleeast/trump-iran-nuclear-deal.html>.

¹⁷² "Advancing the Maximum Pressure Campaign by Restricting Iran's Nuclear Activities," Fact Sheet, Office of the State Department Spokesperson, last modified May 3, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/advancing-the-maximum-pressure-campaign-by-restricting-irans-nuclear-activities/>.

have intensified, and Tehran has stepped away from the terms of the JCPOA by advancing its centrifuges and enriching uranium.¹⁷³

In the course of five years, the United States has gone from securing a nuclear accord with Iran and the P5+1 to maximizing pressure on Iran that has increased tensions between the two nations. How did this shift in policy occur? Did partisan divides lead to these massive changes in policy? What role did social media play in this quandary?

Allowing the Public into the Conversation

The JCPOA born, lived and died in the Internet age. While the details of the JCPOA were still ironed out away behind closed doors, the Internet opened a new door for audience participation every step of the way. However, while many agreements receive progress reports from the mainstream press, the door has not always been as transparent for the public. For example, one of the most famous private negotiations was the Camp David Accords – the first peace agreement between Israel and any of its Arab neighbors.¹⁷⁴ Known officially as the Framework to Peace in the Middle East, the Camp David Accords were signed by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin on September 17, 1978 in the presence of U.S. President Jimmy Carter. The Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty signed in Washington, D.C. on March 26, 1979 was largely based on the proposals discussed at Camp David. However, the agreement took place away from the media and the public – as the foreign leaders

¹⁷³ Nasser Karami, "Iran uses advanced centrifuges, threatens higher enrichment," *The Associated Press*, September 7, 2019, <https://www.apnews.com/7e896f8a1b0c40769b54ed4f98a0f5e6>

¹⁷⁴ Lawrence Wright. *Thirteen Days in September*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2015. Print.

deliberated on the terms of the peace deal in seclusion.¹⁷⁵ Once the accord was released, then the general public was allowed into the conversation through televised news conferences and traditional media outlets.

Instead of moving to a venue far away from the public eye, the JCPOA negotiations, implementation and withdraw played out on U.S. citizen's computer screens. From providing social media updates to selling the deal online to the American public, the Obama administration directly invited the U.S. public on a virtual journey to watch diplomacy unfold before its very eyes. Then, when the Trump administration made the decision to withdraw from the deal and employ the maximum pressure campaign, President Trump publicized his latest diplomatic moves on Twitter for his millions of followers to see. Therefore, while Americans are not completely allowed in the room where it happens, the Internet has opened up a brand new door to diplomacy unlike ever before.¹⁷⁶

Iran in the Media: Pre-JCPOA

Since the 1980s, thwarting Iran's alleged nuclear program has dominated international affairs.¹⁷⁷ In 2015, after months of negotiations between Iran and the international community, the parties came to an agreement and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was born.¹⁷⁸ Known as the P5+1, the United

¹⁷⁵ Lawrence Wright. *Thirteen Days in September*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2015. Print.

¹⁷⁶ Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media*, 395.

¹⁷⁷ The CNN Wire Staff, "Timeline of Iran's controversial nuclear program," *CNN*, March 19, 2012, <https://www.cnn.com/2012/03/06/world/meast/iran-timeline/index.html>.

¹⁷⁸ "Iran nuclear deal: Key details," *BBC*, June 11, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2012/03/06/world/meast/iran-timeline/index.html>.

States, United Kingdom, France, China, Russia and Germany sent their top diplomats to negotiate with Iran with the hope of penning a deal that would curb Iran's nuclear ambitions in exchange for robust sanctions relief.¹⁷⁹ President Barack Obama, in particular, yearned to pen a deal in the hopes of securing a major foreign policy achievement for his presidential legacy.¹⁸⁰

Viewing Iran as the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, the United States wanted to thwart its malign behavior and prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons.¹⁸¹ President Obama viewed the JCPOA as an opportunity to bolster his global achievements before leaving office and used a mix of traditional diplomacy and Internet usage to achieve his mission.¹⁸²

How Did The Administration Begin Nuclear Talks?

In 2012, a Pew Research Center public opinion stated that 63 percent of American citizens supported military action to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.¹⁸³ Therefore, when the international community slapped major sanctions on Iran, the U.S. public generally agreed with that effort. Moreover, the University of

¹⁷⁹ Iran nuclear deal: Key details," *BBC*, June 11, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2012/03/06/world/meast/iran-timeline/index.html>.

¹⁸⁰ Amber Phillips, "Why the Iran deal is so huge for Obama's legacy," *The Washington Post*, July 31, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/07/31/why-the-iran-deal-is-huge-for-obamas-legacy/>.

¹⁸¹ "Iran's Material Support for Terrorism," Fact Sheet, Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, last modified January 24, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/irans-material-support-for-terrorism/>

¹⁸² Phillips, "Obama Legacy."

¹⁸³ "Poll: 63 percent in US back military action to stop Iran from getting nuclear weapons," Pew Research Center, last modified May 19, 2012, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2012/05/18/poll-63-percent-in-us-back-military-action-to-stop-iran-from-getting-nuclear-weapons/>

Maryland found that in 2009-2012 (the years leading up to nuclear negotiations), the media coverage “rarely veered from the narratives propagated by U.S., Iranian, European, and other government officials or explored policy assessments and options that differed from official versions. This tendency resulted in incomplete assessments of the full range of choices available to policy makers.”¹⁸⁴ While the study looked solely at newspaper coverage of Iran’s nuclear program, the findings of this study recommended that “news media could and should play a more active role in framing the issues at stake for the public and policy makers in such a way that a fuller range of political and security factors and policy possibilities are considered.”¹⁸⁵ However, while this study focused primarily on traditional media sources, the Obama administration took the idea one step further by bringing the deal to social media.

Social Media as a Means of Diplomacy

During these negotiations, social media was often used as a means of communication between countries. “Diplomacy in an age of social media is beginning to leave its ozone chamber, its protected past, to become interactive, better networked and more people-centered and people-friendly. Many social media platforms boast of followers and subscribers that equal the populations of large-sized countries.”¹⁸⁶

While President Trump is known for his Twitter use, President Obama was actually the first president to use the social media platform and have an official White

¹⁸⁴ Jonas Siegel and Saranaz Barforoush. “Media coverage of Iran’s nuclear program.” Center for International and Security Studies. <https://spp.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2019-07/media.pdf>

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Nirupama Rao, “Diplomacy in the Age of Social Media” *The Wire*, July 19, 2017, <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/foreign-relations-diplomacy-social-media>

House Twitter account. On Iran in particular, President Obama showcased “Twitter Diplomacy” throughout the nuclear negotiations.¹⁸⁷ Twitter diplomacy on paper sounds like quite a stretch – after all, the discussions behind the nuclear deal were in close door sessions between Iran and the P5+1. However, many grand gestures between the parties were documented via Twitter. From the Iranians making public statements on their respective Twitter pages to the Obama administration creating its own Twitter page to sell the deal, the Iranian nuclear negotiations lived and breathed on social media.

“Diplomats and political leaders are ever more relying on Twitter in their daily practice to communicate with their counterparts. These exchanges occur in view of a global audience, providing an added level of scrutiny that is unique to this form of communication.”¹⁸⁸ Some analysts argue that Twitter played a vital role in the negotiation strategy of the P5+1.¹⁸⁹ It is a crucial demonstration of how social media can shape the struggle for recognition, and thereby legitimize political possibilities for change. Social media challenges the conventional practice of diplomacy.

Rather than relying on formal channels of communication and informal social gatherings, diplomats are increasingly using Twitter to communicate with their counterparts. These Twitter posts are not only viewed by fellow diplomats — they are read by a global audience, adding a never-before-seen level of scrutiny to this form of communication.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Michael Addady, “Here's What Happens to President Obama's Twitter Account When Donald Trump Takes Office,” Time Magazine, November 10, 2016, <https://time.com/4567113/barack-obama-donald-trump-twitter/>

¹⁸⁸ Duncombe, “Twitter,” 545–562.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Similarly, by broadcasting the nuclear negotiations on Twitter, there was suddenly a cast of characters to watch as the talks progressed. Secretary of State John Kerry and Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif played starring roles in the Iran deal talks. Both of them had documented their exchanges via social media in order to showcase the progress they had made toward a deal. “Not only was Twitter used to communicate the positive outcome; the ability of Kerry and Zarif to communicate so freely—a ‘relatively new’ but ‘extraordinarily important’ situation arguably the result of a relationship built through both personal interaction and sustained Twitter communication during the P5+1 nuclear negotiation between 2013 and 2015.”¹⁹¹ Despite the fact that Iran bans Twitter within its borders, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif¹⁹² has more than 1.3 million followers on Twitter, and President Hassan Rouhani¹⁹³ has an audience of more than 800,00 people. As the talks were in their beginning stages, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif released statements putting pressure on the United States to reach a comprehensive agreement via social media. Both Zarif and Rouhani utilized social media to rally support to move closer to a deal. Some of these tweets included: “#Rouhani: If US shows goodwill & intentions based on mutual respect & equal footing without hidden agenda way for interaction will be open,” and “#Zarif: Committed to start drafting the comprehensive nuclear deal immediately. All will be served by a serious agreement based on mutual respect.”¹⁹⁴

In my analysis, this use of “Twitter diplomacy” yielded both positive and negative results. On one hand, Twitter gave the world a front row seat to diplomacy. By reaching

¹⁹¹ Duncombe, “Twitter,” 545–562.

¹⁹² Javad Zarif. Twitter Post. December 1, 2019. <https://twitter.com/JZarif>.

¹⁹³ Hassan Rouhani. Twitter Post. December 1, 2019. <https://twitter.com/HassanRouhani>.

¹⁹⁴ Duncombe, “Twitter,” 545–562.

out directly to Secretary Kerry on social media, Iranian President Rouhani made Iran appear like a viable negotiations partner.¹⁹⁵With an audience of 3.4 million Twitter followers,¹⁹⁶Secretary Kerry placed his Twitter followers in the room where it happened throughout the negotiation and implementation of the deal.

As displayed in the images below, Kerry combined traditional diplomacy tactics with modern social media techniques. By broadcasting these negotiations on social media, he invited the Twitter universe behind the scenes for an inside look at the events unfolding. Kerry's role as the United States' top diplomat was plastered throughout social media.



¹⁹⁵ Ruzika and Wheeler, 'The puzzle of trusting relationships', p. 81; Aaron M. Hoffman, 'A conceptualization of trust in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations* 8: 3, 2002, p. 382.

¹⁹⁶ John Kerry. Twitter. December 13, 2019. <https://twitter.com/johnkerry/media>.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

John Kerry @JohnKerry · Jul 6, 2015
Met today with my colleagues from P5+1+EU in Vienna to discuss the status of negotiations w/ Iran.



87 177 268 198

John Kerry @JohnKerry · May 17, 2016
Stressed importance of full implementation of #JCPOA by all parties while discussing #IranDeal today w/ @JZarif



66 240 583 199

Kerry and Zarif's partnership in particular skewed Iran's image as a viable negotiator due to their close relationship. "Kerry's whole approach to diplomacy at large is premised on the belief that personal relationships matter, because they enable you to get things done, even in very difficult situations," Kerry's aide anonymously informed the press.²⁰⁰ By displaying a strong relationship with Kerry on social media, Iran used this friendship on Twitter to attempt to appear more reasonable and progressive.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

From these images above, they appear to be willing partners who want to create a real relationship with the West. However, these images greatly differ from what is happening on the ground in Tehran. During the time of the nuclear deal, Iran remained the leading state sponsor of terrorism and continued to prop up organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah. By using terror proxies, Iran continued to destabilize the region for its own gain. Additionally, despite the friendship struck between Kerry and Zarif, Iran still continued to shout “Death to America” in the streets throughout the nuclear negotiations.²⁰¹

Therefore, while the actual process of the nuclear negotiations remained the same, the press releases, statements and information spread through social media outlets brought global diplomacy into the 21st Century. Through social media images shared by Kerry, Iran and the Obama administration, Iran appeared to be a peaceful partner. However, they were still oppressing their own people and fueling terrorism through their terror proxies.

In my view, one of the reasons why the Iran deal was so divisive was due to Iran’s perceived image during the negotiations vs. its continued malign behavior in the region. From the beginning, people were incredibly split on whether or not they supported the nuclear accord. The Internet is also “one of the central battlegrounds between hard-liners anxious to control all expression and access in Iran and the majority of the population.”²⁰² Even though the Supreme Leader and the President have

²⁰¹ Robin Wright, “Death to America and the Iran Deal,” *The New Yorker*, July 30, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/death-to-america-and-the-iran-deal>.

²⁰² Robin Wright, “Death to America and the Iran Deal,” *The New Yorker*, July 30, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/death-to-america-and-the-iran-deal>.

taken to using Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram to propagate their messages, the Iranian citizens continue to be censored throughout this process.²⁰³

Selling the Deal

On July 14, 2015, Iran and the international community penned the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The comprehensive deal aimed to curb Iran's chances of acquiring nuclear weapons in exchange for robust sanctions relief. While supporters of the deal hailed the diplomatic feat, opponents feared that the deal paved Iran's way to a nuclear bomb.

Following the accord's implementation, the White House Office of Digital Strategy created a Twitter handle called @TheIranDeal.²⁰⁴ During this time, the White House was able to track all things related to the JCPOA. "So, we developed a plan that was like: The Iran deal is literally going to be the tip of everything that we stand up online," said the Director of Digital Response for the White House Office of Digital Strategy Tanya Somanader.²⁰⁵ "And we're going to map it onto what we know about the different audiences we're dealing with: the public, pundits, experts, the right wing, Congress." On this page, they were able to respond in real time to negative reviews of the deal. Moreover, they were able to create fact sheets and graphics that easily explained the nuclear accord to consumers. Below are some examples of images spread through the Twitter handle.²⁰⁶

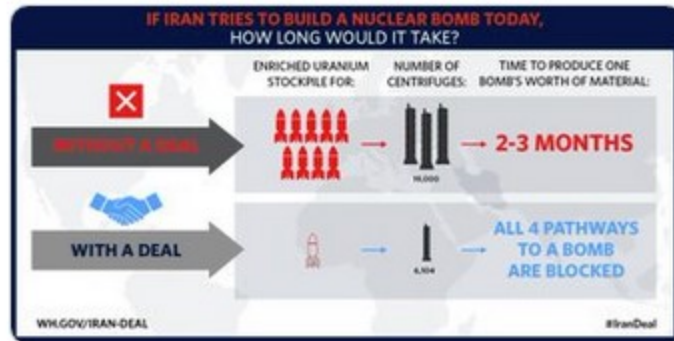
²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ The Iran Deal (NARA). Twitter Handle. December 1, 2019. <https://twitter.com/TheIranDeal>.

²⁰⁵ David Samuels, "The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama's Foreign-Policy Guru," *The New York Times*, May 5, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/death-to-america-and-the-iran-deal>.

²⁰⁶ The Iran Deal (NARA). Twitter Handle. December 1, 2019. <https://twitter.com/TheIranDeal>.

The Iran Deal (NARA) @TheIranDeal · Oct 18, 2015
 Here's why adoption of the #IranDeal is so vital to a safer world → go.wh.gov/IranDeal



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The Iran Deal (NARA) @TheIranDeal · Sep 15, 2015
 Replying to @GOPLeader
 What's dangerous is a nuclear-armed Iran, @GOPLeader. Hint: The #IranDeal prevents it → go.wh.gov/IranDeal



13 43 30 208

Moreover, the Obama administration – with the leadership of U.S. Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communications Ben Rhodes – presented a “narrative” and shaped the policy discussion surrounding the Iran nuclear deal. Rhodes has been hailed “Obama’s foreign-policy guru” who “rewrote the rules of diplomacy for the digital age.”²⁰⁹²¹⁰ With a position created for him, Ben Rhodes served as the chief

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Fred Kaplan, “Ben Rhodes Needs Some Fresh Air” *Slate*, May 9, 2016, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2016/05/how-to-read-david-samuels-profile-of-obama-foreign-policy-aide-ben-rhodes.html/>

²¹⁰ Suzanne Maloney, “Deception and the Iran deal: Did the Obama administration mislead America, or did the Rhodes profile?” *The Brookings Institution*, May 11, 2016,

architect behind the communications campaign over the diplomacy with Iran and essentially sold the deal to the public.²¹¹ “Rhodes engaged in a no-holds-barred campaign to win support for the deal ... In addition to this digital strategy, Rhodes and other senior U.S. officials convened West Wing briefings to evangelize the administration’s key messages among core constituencies (including, notably, skeptics of the Iran diplomacy).”²¹² Rhode’s role in marketing the deal to the American public truly made a difference in terms of garnering support for the accord. ²¹³

Under Rhodes’ watch, the Obama administration utilized social media to respond in real time to their critiques. “By applying 21st-century data and networking tools to the white-glove world of foreign affairs, the White House was able to track what United States senators and the people who worked for them, and influenced them, were seeing online — and make sure that no potential negative comment passed without a tweet.”²¹⁴

The marriage of social media with traditional techniques was exemplified by the Obama administration during this time.²¹⁵ For instance, President Obama made several personal addresses about the deal between July 2015 when it was announced and January 2016 when it was implemented. By teasing the speeches on social media, the

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/05/11/deception-and-the-iran-deal-did-the-obama-administration-mislead-america-or-did-the-rhodes-profile/>

²¹¹ Kaplan, “Ben Rhodes.”

²¹² Suzanne Maloney, “Deception and the Iran deal: Did the Obama administration mislead America, or did the Rhodes profile?” *The Brookings Institution*, May 11, 2016,

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/05/11/deception-and-the-iran-deal-did-the-obama-administration-mislead-america-or-did-the-rhodes-profile/>

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ David Samuels, “The Aspiring Novelist Who Became Obama’s Foreign-Policy Guru,” *The New York Times*, May 5, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/death-to-america-and-the-iran-deal>.

²¹⁵ Barack Obama. “Remarks by the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal” The White House Archives, August 5, 2015. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/05/remarks-president-iran-nuclear-deal>

Obama administration ensured more viewers would watch his public statements on the accord.



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On August 5, 2015, President Obama delivered a major address to the American public on the Iran deal. In his speech, he addressed the U.S. citizens and laid out why the nuclear deal was penned. “The choice we face is ultimately between diplomacy or some form of war -- maybe not tomorrow, maybe not three months from now, but soon.”²¹⁷ By painting the deal as diplomacy or war, President Obama was effectively and strategically convincing the public to side with him on the JCPOA. Afterwards, Obama’s remarks were tweeted and shared throughout social media. By taking

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

traditional speeches and repopulating them on the Internet, the Obama administration was able to widely broadcast its approach to diplomacy.

Israel, Social Media and the Failed Public Relations of the JCPOA

From the outset, Israel's leadership stood against the deal, but they did not leverage social media as masterfully as the United States. With Israel's proximity to Iran and its terror proxies, the nation did have good reasons to oppose the deal. Policymakers have often referred to Israel as a "one-bomb country" because of its small size and dense population center. In recent years, Iran has tested ballistic missiles with the ominous message "Israel must be wiped off the map" boldly inscribed on the weapons. While a bomb in itself may not completely destroy Israel, the political and economic turmoil that comes with a nuclear attack would be catastrophic for the Jewish state.²¹⁸

Additionally, a nuclear-capable Iran could potentially spark a nuclear arms race in the Middle East – right on Israel's doorstep. Once Iran garners a nuclear weapon, then Saudi Arabia and other leading Arab states may be tempted to create their own programs. "Iran's possession of nuclear weapons will create greater instability in the Middle East. An accidental or inadvertent nuclear exchange between Iran and Israel would be a dangerous possibility. Moreover, quite aside from how Iran might behave, its

²¹⁸ Cohen, Avner. *Israel and the Bomb*. October 1999.

possession of nuclear weapons could arguably set off a cascade effect, encouraging other regional rivals to move in the same direction.”²¹⁹

This would be a colossal security risk for Israel – which is bordered entirely by Arab states. Saudi Arabia, for example, has already expressed its desire for nuclear weapons if Iran acquired them. Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal stated in 2012 that “We [Saudi Arabia] cannot live in a situation where Iran has nuclear weapons and we don’t ... If Iran develops a nuclear weapon, that will be unacceptable to us and we will have to follow suit.” Despite the “enemy of my enemy is my friend” mentality, Israel steadfastly continues to draw red lines vis-à-vis other Arab nations attaining nuclear weapons capabilities.

In September 2012, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu drew a red line against Iran at the UNGA. “At this late hour, there is only one way to peacefully prevent Iran from getting atomic bombs — that’s by placing a clear red line on Iran’s nuclear program,” Netanyahu said. Then, he drew a red line on the diagram just under the words “Final Stage.” Moreover, only 25 percent of Americans surveyed in March 2012 supported an Israeli military attack against Iranian nuclear installations, while more than 74 percent of respondents in this survey thought the United States should work through the U.N. Security Council, presumably by engaging a broader set of stakeholders to achieve a peaceful resolution.²²⁰ For these reasons, Israel pushed back on the accord.

²¹⁹ Nader, Alireza. *Iran After the Bomb*. 2013.

²²⁰ Steven Kull and Shibley Telhami, “Americans on Israel and the Iranian Nuclear Program,” Program on International Policy Attitudes Report, March 13, 2012.

However, while Israel's leadership were among the biggest opponents of the accord, they could not "sell" the anti-deal argument as well as the Obama administration and the international community could sell the deal. Before the deal was inked, Benjamin Netanyahu opted for an old-school approach to lobby against a potentially devastating accord for Israel.

In March 2015, he lobbied a joint session of Congress, warning against a flawed deal without meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama. This old school technique ultimately caused him to lose points in the argument against the deal.

One the deal was reached, Benjamin Netanyahu attempted to use Twitter to push back on the deal. However, his efforts were not nearly as refined as the Obama administration's social media avenues.



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Moreover, Obama's talking points and digital strategies simply outsmarted Bibi. In one of his speeches retweeted on his social media pages, he stated "I recognize that Prime Minister Netanyahu disagrees -- disagrees strongly. I do not doubt his sincerity. But I believe he is wrong. I believe the facts support this deal. I believe they are in America's interest and Israel's interest."²²² While Israel ultimately tried to state its case,

²²¹ Benjamin Netanyahu. Twitter. July 14 2015.

<https://twitter.com/netanyahu/status/621381785377599488?lang=en>.

²²² Barack Obama. "Remarks by the President on the Iran Nuclear Deal" The White House Archives, August 5, 2015. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/05/remarks-president-iran-nuclear-deal>

President Obama's team was so strategic in selling the deal that they could not compete with the United States.²²³

Opponents of the Nuclear Accord, Activist Groups and Social Media

Activist groups and members of Congress alike were able to use social media to express their views. From United Against a Nuclear Iran to NIAC, activist groups across the political spectrum took advantage of social media to explain their support for or opposition to the nuclear accord. From taking out digital ads to creating online petitions, these groups did everything in their power to push back on the JCPOA.

While activist groups have always advocated their policies to the media, they now had the ability to spread information in real time through social media. Activist groups used Facebook and Twitter to push online petitions, spread memos and fact sheets and circulate opinion pieces through their social media channels. To bring the fight into the 21st Century and strengthen their digital efforts, some activist groups spent between \$20-40 million on their lobbying efforts.²²⁴

According to the *Washington Post*, anti-Iran deal groups in particular combined traditional lobbying efforts with social media campaigns in their efforts to quash the deal. Moreover, many members of anti-Iran deal groups created "a steady stream of content

²²³ Robert Mackey, "Netanyahu Launches Persian Twitter Feed to Rail Against Iran Deal," *The New York Times*, July 21, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2015/07/21/anti-iran-deal-groups-firing-on-all-cylinders-in-massive-lobbying-push/>

²²⁴ Catherine Ho, "Anti-Iran deal groups firing on all cylinders in massive lobbying push," *The Washington Post*, July 21, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2015/07/21/anti-iran-deal-groups-firing-on-all-cylinders-in-massive-lobbying-push/>

on Facebook and Twitter quoting lawmakers and policy experts who express criticism or skepticism about the deal.”²²⁵

Simultaneously, media organizations such as *NBC*, *CNN*, *ABC* and *Fox News* worked with the various groups to publish opinion pieces to educate the public on the deal from various perspectives. While the mainstream media played a large role in informing the public on the JCPOA, activist groups often supplemented their material with an action item for their participants. Supporters of the various activist groups often digested the material delivered from their parent organizations and used it to lobby their members of Congress or sign online petitions for or against the deal. In terms of social media influence and activism, social media has opened up a new wave of communication that enables individuals to create widespread movements through their computer screens. ²²⁶

In Congress, the Iran deal became a largely partisan issue– with Democrats backing President Obama and Republicans siding against him. More and more, members of Congress were taking to social media platforms to disclose whether they favored or opposed the deal. Even though many members of Congress released press releases or editorials explaining their decisions on the nuclear accord, many of them realized that a Tweet or Facebook post would have a large reach to the community as well. Additionally, members of Congress shared their official statements on their social media platforms to get the most bang for their buck.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ J. Taylor Benjamin. *Extreme Media and American Politics* (Wilmington, NC: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1.

As the nuclear accord never actually went to a vote, social media was one of the few places where members of Congress could share their opinions of the nuclear deal. Moreover, while the deal was largely split along party lines, there were a handful of Democrats who expressed their desire to ultimately vote against the nuclear accord including Chuck Schumer, Ben Cardin, Grace Meng, Juan Vargas and others. By using social media, these members were able to get their views about the deal on the record.

Between activist groups, congressional approval and the Obama administration's lobbying efforts, the United States population became increasingly split on the deal. In 2015, a survey by the University of Maryland's Program for Public Consultation discovered that 52 percent of U.S. citizens wanted Congress to approve the deal and 47 percent wanted the legislative branch to reject it.²²⁷

"Democrats and Republicans are polar opposites in their view of the accord, which would lift international sanctions against the Islamic republic in exchange for Iran restricting its nuclear program so it cannot build nuclear weapons for a decade or longer. Nearly 7 in 10 Democrats support the deal. An identical share of Republicans are opposed. Among independents, 6 in 10 express support."²²⁸ Moreover, a Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll conducted in 2015 found that 71 percent of U.S. citizens

²²⁷ Scott Clement and Carol Morello, "New poll shows how sharply partisan the debate on Iran deal has become," *The Washington Post*, September 1, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/new-poll-shows-how-sharply-partisan-the-debate-on-iran-deal-has-become/2015/08/31/1f0f0790-501c-11e5-9812-92d5948a40f8_story.html.

²²⁸ Ibid.

did not believe that the negotiations with Tehran would prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.²²⁹

While the anti-deal activist groups did not succeed in stopping the implementation of the deal, they gained some success by pushing public opinion even more against the deal. Even though the anti-Iran deal groups did not make a huge impact following the implementation of the nuclear accord, they brought the Iran deal into the conversation. Moreover, both supporters and opponents of the nuclear deal kept Iran in the national discourse throughout the U.S. presidential election in 2016. By remaining a hot topic issue throughout the election, President Trump focused on Iran as one of his priorities as a candidate. This set the stage for President Trump's decision to ultimately withdraw from the JCPOA.

Iran in the Media: Post JCPOA

In May, making good on his campaign promise, President Trump withdrew from the Iran nuclear accord. According to Pew Research, around the time that President Trump withdrew from the JCPOA, more Americans said they disapproved (40%) than approved (32%) of the agreement, with about a quarter (28%) offering no opinion.²³⁰ However, once he decided to fully withdraw from the accord, the country began to split along partisan lines. Much of the mainstream media took to Twitter to broadcast their responses to the reversed decision.

²²⁹ Jacob Puster. "Americans (especially Republicans) distrustful of Iran as nuclear deal looms," Pew Research Center, last modified March 18, 2015.

²³⁰ "Public Is Skeptical of the Iran Agreement – and Trump's Handling of the Issue," Pew Research Center, last modified May 8, 2018, <https://www.people-press.org/2018/05/08/public-is-skeptical-of-the-iran-agreement-and-trumps-handling-of-the-issue/>

Since the passage of the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act in 2015, public support for the deal had declined in Congress. Currently, just 21% of the American public approves of the agreement on Iran's nuclear program reached between the United States, Iran and other nations. Nearly half (49%) disapprove of the agreement, while three-in-ten (30%) offer no opinion.²³¹

When President Trump left the JCPOA, he used social media to broadcast why he withdrew. While the Obama administration has mastered the art of selling ideas via social media, President Trump often bypasses normal protocol and speaks directly to his base via Twitter. "Even the tweets are more likely to be remembered as mastery of new technology — akin to F.D.R.'s 'fireside chats' — than the outrage and embarrassment journalists deplore... His instincts in domestic and foreign affairs are identifiably conservative, with certain exceptions."²³² While President Trump is able to reach his base through rallies and face-to-face interactions, he uses Twitter to address the nation and share his unfiltered view of the world. President Trump's Twitter feed has become must read news for mainstream media, cabinet secretaries, members of Congress and the general public to fully understand what is going on in the president's head.

Furthermore, President Trump used Twitter to simplify his message on Iran. In his Twitter posts, he called Iran "bad," "evil," and "dangerous." By building a social

²³¹ "Support for Iran Nuclear Agreement Falls," Pew Research Center, last modified September 15, 2015, <https://www.people-press.org/2015/09/08/support-for-iran-nuclear-agreement-falls/>

²³² Jason Rezaian, "Iran is spreading lies on social media. There's an easy way to stop them.," *The Washington Post*, August 23, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/08/23/iran-is-spreading-lies-on-social-media-but-stopping-them-could-be-a-cinch/>

media messaging campaign against Iran, he prepared the country for his withdrawal from the “disastrous deal.” Moreover, unlike 20th Century presidents, President Trump relies on his tweets as press releases.²³³ Therefore, once it became apparent that he was against the nuclear accord, it came as little surprise when the country pulled out.²³⁴

His decision caused a wave of discussion across all online platforms. Traditional news organizations, think tanks, politicians and U.S. citizens used their social media channels to showcase their support or disdain for leaving the nuclear accord.

Moreover, President Obama and his former administration officials used their social media platforms to announce their objections to exiting the deal.²³⁵ “Even as some of the provisions in the JCPOA do become less strict with time, this won’t happen until ten, fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five years into the deal, so there is little reason to put those restrictions at risk today,” Obama wrote in a Facebook post responding to Trump’s announcement.²³⁶

Former Secretary of State John Kerry spoke out on President Trump’s latest decision via Twitter.

²³³ Trump Withdrew From the Iran Deal. Here’s How Republicans, Democrats and the World Reacted. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/world/middleeast/trump-iran-deal-republicans-democrats-world-reactions.html>

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Philip Terzian, “Whom Does President Trump Remind You Of?,” *The New York Times*, December 9, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/09/opinion/trump-rhetoric-precedents.html?fbclid=IwAR2FtbkUW36j9h0R3XB_VtNTiJFy6FImEc3CSMeaxxEW-7D5kWXldBKDiEY

²³⁶ Salvador Rizzo and Meg Kelly, “Fact-checking President Trump’s reasons for leaving the Iran nuclear deal,” *The Washington Post*, May 9, 2018. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2018/05/09/fact-checking-president-trumps-reasons-for-leaving-the-iran-nuclear-deal/>



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Follow

My thoughts on President Trump's Iran statement:

"Today's announcement weakens our security, breaks America's word, isolates us from our European allies, puts Israel at greater risk, empowers Iran's hardliners, and reduces our global leverage to address Tehran's misbehavior, while damaging the ability of future Administrations to make international agreements. No rhetoric is required. The facts speak for themselves. Instead of building on unprecedented nonproliferation verification measures, this decision risks throwing them away and dragging the world back to the brink we faced a few years ago. The extent of the damage will depend on what Europe can do to hold the nuclear agreement together, and it will depend on Iran's reaction. America should never have to outsource those stakes to any other country. This is not in America's interests. We should all hope the world can preserve the nuclear agreement."

12:15 PM - 8 May 2018

3,688 Retweets 8,619 Likes



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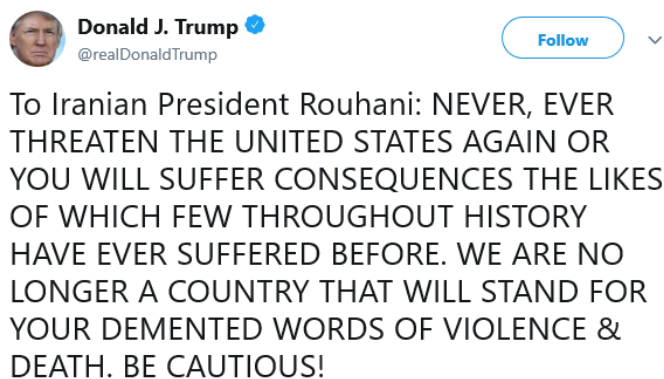
Following the withdrawal from the deal, the United States has ramped up its sanctions efforts as part of the “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran. The Iranians, on the other hand, have been violating the terms of a dying deal by enriching uranium. Moreover, tensions between the United States and Iran have publicly heated up on social media channels since America placed sanctions back on the Iranians. Arguments that begin offline often find its way to Twitter in the age of Donald Trump.

Once the United States announced the reimposition of sanction, Iran President Hassan Rouhani addressed a gathering of Iranian diplomats who asked about the impact of those sanctions. “Mr. Trump, don’t play with the lion’s tail, this would only lead to regret ... America should know that peace with Iran is the mother of all peace, and war with Iran is the mother of all wars,” Rouhani said, leaving open the possibility of peace between the two countries, at odds since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.”²³⁸

²³⁷ John Kerry. Twitter. May 8, 2018. <https://twitter.com/johnkerry/media>.

²³⁸ Reuters Staff, “Iran's Rouhani warns Trump about 'mother of all wars'.” Reuters, July 28, 2018.

However, using the power of social media, President Trump was able to directly call out the Iranian president on his words.



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As suggested in the Twitter exchange above, social media has now become a rhetoric battleground between Iran and America – exchanging quips as the U.S. continues to sanction Iran. While an all-out war has not yet broken out, there have been a series of minor scimmages between the United States and Iran – including the

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-usa-rouhani-idUSKBN1KC07Z>

²³⁹Donald Trump. Twitter. July 22, 2018.

<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1021234525626609666?s=20>.

²⁴⁰Javad Zarif. Twitter, July 23, 2018. <https://twitter.com/JZarif/status/1021471196242735104?s=20>

downing of a U.S. drone. By providing an online forum for the two parties to disparage each other, social media could potentially pave the way toward real life consequences.

Over the past few months, Iranian-backed militias plotted a spate of rocket targeting U.S. bases and interests in Iraq. One of these attacks killed a U.S. civilian contractor on a Kirkuk base and wounded several U.S. troops in the region. Following that attack, the American military launched airstrikes against the Iranian-backed Iraqi militia, killing more than 20 members.

In response to the U.S. airstrikes, Iranian-backed demonstrators stormed, sieged and destroyed parts of the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. Thousands of protesters and militia fighters chanted "Death to America," threw stones and painted graffiti on the walls. U.S. President Donald Trump blamed Iran for "orchestrating" the attack on the embassy and added that they would be held "fully responsible."

Then, on Jan. 3, a U.S. airstrike killed Iranian Gen. Qasem Soleimani – the commander of the Iranian Revolution Guard Corps' elite Quds Force. Thousands of mourners, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders, attended Gen. Soleimani' s funeral ceremony in Tehran. In retaliation for the murder, Iran fired dozens of ballistic missiles at Iraqi bases hosting U.S. troops.



While the JCPOA was born in the age of Twitter diplomacy, it ended in a Twitter war zone – with the ultimate targeted killing of Gen. Soleimani and a continued reaction from Iran against the United States. Since both presidents garnered a direct line to the public through the Internet, they also gained the public’s trust by cutting out the media and communicating straight to their constituents.²⁴² This also provided a new platform to present their points of view to their supporters and increase tensions on topics such as the Iran nuclear accord. One negative consequence of the social media is that it promotes such polarization on policy perspectives.

²⁴¹ Donald Trump. Twitter, January 3, 2020.
<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1213096351296299017>

²⁴² EE Schattschneider, *The Semi- Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc).

From Donald Trump and his supporters boasting about the latest maximum pressure campaign on Iran to former Obama administration officials rallying on Twitter to back the deal, the accord exemplifies the power social media now holds in major foreign policy efforts.

Chapter Three Conclusion

From the mainstream media to citizen journalism, and from politicians to activist groups, the rise of social media has changed the dynamics of global diplomacy, international decision-making and large-scale movements.²⁴³ Looking at Iran policy specifically, social media users have demonstrated the power to propel uprisings against authoritarian regimes, stimulate diplomacy and sour relationships between nations. In this chapter, I found that social media was utilized by U.S. policy and decision makers to hone in and deliver their policy messages to the general public. By gathering masses of followers on social media avenues including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, policymakers are able to cut out the middleman and use the Internet to speak directly to the people.²⁴⁴

While both traditional media outlets and interest groups played a role in providing breaking news updates and analysis regarding the JCPOA, the policymakers truly took the lead on presenting the positive and negative aspects of the Iran nuclear accord. By examining the JCPOA in comparison to major global accords of the past, this diplomatic effort played out online in front of the American public. While the ironing out of the

²⁴³ Benkler and Nissenbaum. "Commons-based Peer Production."

²⁴⁴ James Rosneau. *National Leadership and Foreign Policy: A Case in the Mobilization of Public Support*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), 132

details both to stay in and withdraw from the deal remained behind closed doors, Americans had more access than ever before to the policymakers thanks to social media.

Thesis Conclusion and Key Findings

The Internet has changed how the world communicates, and this thesis explored the connection between the Internet age and foreign policy.²⁴⁵ Before the Internet, people interpreted the world based on newspaper articles, organized large-scale protests, and listened to world leaders address major decisions.²⁴⁶ Fast forwarding to today, the world now has an instant platform that provides increased access to the foreign policy sphere. By examining the U.S.-Israel relationship, the Arab Spring and the Iran deal, this thesis showcased how individuals can delve into Middle East policy with a click of a button.

In the first chapter, I explored the U.S.-Israel relationship and how U.S. public opinion of Israel has changed in the age of digital media. The foreign policy community in particular has seen major shifts in communication strategies as a result of social media's global reach and popularity. While traditional news sources such as newspapers and policy publications use social media to promote their own content, individual bloggers have risen as a result of the social media age. Additionally, the use of shared images has also changed the game because the Internet often blurs the lines between the digital world and reality—influencing an individual's interpretation of the events on the ground.²⁴⁷ Moreover, with the growing variety of news sources, there is also a rise in partisan media. Now, individuals can filter news based on their own

²⁴⁵ Olubukola S. Adesina, (2017) Foreign policy in an era of digital diplomacy, *Cogent Social Sciences*, 3:1, DOI: [10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2017.1297175)

²⁴⁶ Andreas Kaplan and Maichael Haenlein. *Users of the world, United*. (Business Horizons, 2010), p.p. 59-68.

²⁴⁷ Nausicaa Renner, "How Social Media Shapes Identity" *The New Yorker*, August 8. 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/how-social-media-shapes-our-identity>

individual preferences and only select media based on their own points of view.²⁴⁸ In my view, this key finding is a negative impact of the Internet because it adds misleading data and subjective material into the stories that citizens read.

Throughout the second chapter, I spotlighted how citizens, activists, mainstream media and politicians use social media to reach the public and implement change. The Arab Spring paved the way for citizen journalism as social media brought the Middle East spectacle to computer screens around the globe. With the Internet growing in popularity as a way to bridge the gap between world leaders, journalists, movement organizers and the general public, this new technological field has opened up new avenues in global communication and sparked massive movements from social media channels. Moreover, governments, newspapers, bloggers and individual citizens discovered how to use social media to control the narrative and craft the messaging regarding major world events. As the Arab Spring protesters used social media to topple regimes and spread democracy, the major players involved utilized social media as a weapon against authoritarian regimes during the Arab Spring.

The other key finding is that the Arab Spring contrasted an insider vs. outsider use of politics. While protests have occurred before in these nations, the Arab Spring leaders were able to mobilize more followers via social media channels. With technological advancements allowing for faster communication worldwide, the movement organizers initially reaped the benefits of social media by attracting more citizens to their movement.

²⁴⁸ Allison Archer, *Political Advantage, Disadvantage, and the Demand for Partisan News*, (Journal of Politics, 2018), 1-4.

However, following the Arab Spring, Middle Eastern leaders were able to harness social media, learning new communication tools from the protesters attempting to topple their regimes. Even though the protestors mobilized the movement, Middle East regimes now better comprehend how to use social media against their citizens and use it inside the political sphere.²⁴⁹

In the third chapter, the Iran nuclear deal displayed how politicians and activist groups leverage social media to emphasize major foreign policy initiatives. This case study showcased how social media can ultimately play a large role in global affairs. Furthermore, the Iran nuclear deal underscored how foreign policy is conveyed through social media and communication tools by educating the nation on major policy agreements.

With younger generations turning away from traditional news sources, social media sites allow individuals to instantaneously receive news on politics and current events.²⁵⁰ Moreover, politicians on the world stage have the ability to communicate directly to the public through their various social media channels.

Social media provides Internet users from around the world with a bird's eye view into politics.²⁵¹ From observing footage from the protests of the Arab Spring to watching the political drama of the nuclear deal unfold, social media has given its users unparalleled access into the events shaping the Middle East.

²⁴⁹ Ratcliffe, "Arab Spring."

²⁵⁰ Geoffrey Baym. "The Daily Show: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism." *Informaworld* 22.2 (2005): 259-276. *JSTOR*. Web. 21 Apr. 2010.

²⁵¹ Tim Highfield. "Social Media and Everyday Politics," 70.

While the three case studies illustrate how the Internet has transformed foreign policy, there are still infinite areas to explore within this arena. For future researchers, I would highly recommended following the latest updates regarding the U.S.-Iran relationship. Even though my research incorporated the most recent escalations between the two parties, there will likely be more progressions on this front moving forward. Will there be a new nuclear accord? Will there be a war between the United States and Iran? In what ways will these new U.S. sanctions cripple the Iranian economy? And how will this all be played out on social media?

Additionally, as technology grows, there are new platforms that are also rising in stature. While my thesis focused largely on Facebook and Twitter, there are a slew of other platforms to explore including Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and more. Furthermore, I primarily focused my research on English language media, but there is still a lot to explore in the Arab and Israeli mainstream media and social media channels. As social media continues to proliferate around the world, there will be constant new developments regarding how the Internet impacts the Middle East. Even though this thesis focused on the Internet Age's influence on the Middle East in real time, the lasting effects of social media's power continue to unfold. I would highly recommend that researchers explore future trends in the Internet Age as new technologies and communication platforms develop. Additionally, researchers should investigate how this blossoming technology can be used in the future to influence the state of play in both the Middle East and around the world. I would highly recommend that the use of social media in the Middle East should be explored again in the next 10,

20 and 30 years to see how the Internet Age has impacted policy and communication decisions over time.

While new technology has changed the way the news is presented, the power of social media has changed how the country (and the world) consumes media.²⁵² In the next decade, I predict that social media will have an increasingly larger impact on the Middle East and beyond. From showcasing exchanges between world leaders to sharing images of turmoil in the region, the Internet age has made a major impact on how the world communicates.

Now, policymakers have the power to speak directly to the public, bloggers can garner an audience with one viral post and people have more choices on where they receive their news. Moving ahead, digital media will likely remain as a major influence on global affairs for the foreseeable future.

²⁵² Ibid.

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