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The rhetoric of public diplomacy and propaganda wars: A view from self-presentation theory

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Abstract. Efforts by governments to affect foreign public opinion through direct communication – and in competition with rival governments – have been a stable and consistent feature of international diplomacy since the turn of the twentieth century. Yet public diplomacy and its use in propaganda wars has not been sufficiently theorized, a lacuna that this article seeks to address by means of the social-psychological theory of self-presentation and impression management. The discussion suggests that public diplomacy is a form of self-presentation for social empowerment, in which rhetorical strategies and associated tactics are means of addressing image predicaments in foreign public opinion. The analysis is illustrated by means of the recent Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its presentation in the official websites of the parties.

Public diplomacy in international relations

‘Who appears as what in the eyes of others (as well as in his and in his people’s own eyes) constitutes a basic element in the formation of the world views that underlie action. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that today half of “power politics” consists of image-making.’ This observation, and the accompanying call for a broader agenda in realist research, was voiced by John Herz (1981: 187) two decades before the September 11 attack on the United States revived interest in influencing foreign public opinion through public diplomacy. After having been relegated to the sidelines with the winding down of the Cold War,¹ the challenge of ‘winning hearts and minds’ acquired new urgency and appeal, as expressed in the admonition of the 9/11 Commission that: ‘If the United States does not act aggressively to define itself in the Islamic world, the extremists will gladly do the job for us.’²

Periodic fluctuations notwithstanding, efforts by governments to affect foreign public opinion through direct communication – and in competition with rival governments – have been a stable and consistent feature of international diplomacy since the turn of the twentieth century (see Taylor 1995). In its closing two decades, moreover, the communications revolution and the

democratization wave have arguably combined to intensify the role that *soft power* (Nye 1990) – of which public diplomacy consists – has come to play in the foreign policies of many states. One notable expression of this trend is that the arena for so-called ‘propaganda wars’, long centered on the print media and the radio, has expanded to embrace the reach and immediacy of global television and, recently, the Internet. Impervious to the constraints of time and place, the battle of ideas in pursuit of political influence ‘abroad’ is now waged on a much grander scale, and states are adjusting to the new reality by changing their propaganda strategies.

Despite the growing importance of public diplomacy in war and peace, its conduct has yet to be addressed at a theoretical level as diplomatic theory is still dominated by a concern with government-to-government communication and with the application of ‘objective’, ‘hard’ power. Perceptions, images and impressions – especially as they pertain to public opinion – are simply not at the forefront of analysis. Not only is this deficient from a descriptive point of view, but even the key concept (and major explanatory variable) in realist variants of the theory – national power – is thereby rendered insufficiently sensitive to, and increasingly divorced from, the changing nature of state influence in the contemporary international system. Theory development, then, calls for focusing more closely and systematically on what constitutes power in the information age, and on the interplay between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power in the foreign policies and interactions of states.

This is the broad research agenda that informs this article. Its immediate and more restricted objective, however, is to theorize public diplomacy as an influence strategy and, more specifically, to account for the structure and substance of the themes by which states seek to promote their image with a foreign public: What conditions provide incentives for the management of impressions? Which strategies of image projection do states employ under these different conditions? How, in particular, does strategic competition affect the conduct of public diplomacy in the new media?

These questions are addressed from the perspective of the social psychological theories of self-presentation and impression management. The basic contention is that public diplomacy is a form of self-presentation, by which states, like individuals, try to affect the attributions that significant others (in this case: foreign publics) make with respect to their identity. Such attributions are best understood within a social power context because they are often the key to other forms of influence that the self-presenter seeks to acquire. By providing an *integrated* perspective that associates power- and image-related situations with specific forms of rhetorical self-presentation, the theory allows us to transcend the common practice in the literature of compiling itemized lists of disparate propaganda tactics. On the empirical side, these latter tactics

are examined in the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where both parties can be viewed as engaging in competitive self-presentation as a means of power augmentation in the domestic arenas of external actors.

The article is organized as follows. The next section provides a brief review of the international relations (IR) literature on image projection and rhetorical bargaining to examine its relevance and possible contribution to the understanding of public diplomacy. This is followed by the introduction and discussion of key concepts and ideas in self-presentation theory, which are then reinterpreted and defined for the kind of strategic setting in which competitive public diplomacy or propaganda wars unfold. The theory is then examined in an empirical setting by means of a thematic analysis of self-presentation rhetoric in official websites of the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority (PA). Finally, the argument and the empirical findings are summarized and some challenges for future research are outlined.

Image projection and rhetorical bargaining in IR theory

Although public diplomacy as such has not been theorized in the IR literature, the generic phenomenon of self-presentation has received scholarly attention through concern with images, whose production and manipulation are objectives of self-presenting actors.³ An image can be defined as 'the organized representation of an object in an individual's cognitive system'. It is an inferred construct that comprises an individual's conception of an object's character (Kelman 1965: 24). Boulding (1956: 111) considered symbolic images of nations to be 'absolutely necessary as part of the economy of image-formation', and Kunczik (1997: 38–39) treats them as 'hardened prejudices' whose function it is not only to simplify reality into manageable categories (or stereotypes), but also to differentiate ingroups from outgroups. At the international level, the importance of images derives from their presumed effect on state behavior: '[T]he foreign policy of a nation addresses itself not to the external world, as is commonly stated, but rather to "the *image* of the external world" that is in the minds of those who make foreign policy' (George 1980: 55, quoting Louis Halle; emphasis in original).

Some scholars sought to explain foreign policy by focusing on national *self-images* (Kaplowitz 1990) and national role conceptions (Holsti 1970; Walker 1987). Although self-identity is an important component of projected identity, the crucial point from a presentational perspective is the inferential nature of the image, which opens up the possibility for manipulation (Jervis 1970: 10). Given the evident effect of one state's image on another's policy towards it, influence-seeking actors acquire the drive for deliberate image

projection. This insight underlay the literature on achieving credibility in crisis bargaining and building long-term reputations for resolve (e.g., Schelling 1960, 1966; Leng 1983; Morrow 1989; Powell 1990; Lieberman 1995), with rhetoric making its contribution by engaging domestic audience costs (Fearon 1994; Sartori 2002).

Whereas rationalist studies grounded in realist assumptions tended to view rhetoric-based image manipulation as epiphenomenal to hard (materialist) power, more recent constructivist work offers a different view, arguing that 'if international politics is understood as social, defined by a normative structure, and populated by actors who care about their reputations, the means of influence can include discursive, symbolic and communicative action' (Barnett 1998: 28). From this perspective, empirical work has demonstrated how powerful rhetoric can be when it generates threats to the legitimacy of leaders who share a normative order and depend on each other for their self-image as well as public standing (e.g., Barnett 1998; Lynch 1999; Schimmelfennig 2001; see also Trout 1975).

The study of public diplomacy as a form of self-presentation overlaps to some extent both the realist-rationalist and constructivist views. From the latter it takes the observation that self-presentation occurs in a *social* setting, among social actors, and even if the identities they project are manipulated for power-augmentation purposes (as argued below), they do mirror the meaning and nature of power in their social milieu: A society in which, say, self-presentational strategies of intimidation dominate as a source of social influence (as in realist anarchy) is different from a society in which strategies of promoting conflict resolution competence have this status. This is all the more so in the case of public diplomacy, with its rhetoric of justification, which is meaningful only within a normative structure (Finnemore 1996: 159; Lynch 1999: 39).

Yet if public diplomacy arguments are usually *framed* in terms of the 'logic of appropriateness', they are nevertheless driven by the rationalist 'logic of consequentialism',⁴ seeking influence and self-interest as propaganda does.⁵ The relationship between performers (states, in our case) and social norms has been cogently defined by Goffman (1959: 251): '*qua* performers, individuals are concerned not with the moral issue of realizing these standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realized'. However, just as norms can yield instrumentality, so can instrumentality through the 'civilizing force of hypocrisy' (Elster 1995: 250) reinforce norms, which is another way the logics of consequentialism and appropriateness are connected.⁶

Turning to rhetorical *means*, it is clear that public diplomacy does not conform to Risse's (2000) 'logic of arguing' because the latter involves

cooperative truth-seeking behavior whereas propaganda instrumentalizes truth by turning it from an end into a means (Cunningham 2002: 137). And although Schimmelfennig's (2001: 61) concept of 'rhetorical action' – the 'strategic use of norm-based arguments in pursuit of one's self-interest' – captures an essential aspect of public diplomacy, the latter, in contrast to the former, is not a means of affecting outcomes in a situation of distributive bargaining. This article argues, then, that the specific characteristics that set public diplomacy apart from communicative or rhetorical action are more profitably analyzed as self-presentation. The following two sections develop this point.

Self-presentation and impression management: A brief introduction

Impression management through self-presentation can be defined as 'any behavior by a person that has the purpose of controlling or manipulating the attributions and impressions formed of that person by others' (Tedeschi & Riess 1981: 3).⁷ Implicit in this definition is the assumption that attributions of dispositions, preferences or identities that are commonly made in society with respect to a given actor derive – at least to a significant degree – from what can be observed about that actor's behavior. Thus, if social actors have a stake in how they are perceived by significant others, and if that perception is subject to manipulation (at least to some extent), then self-presentation can become a means of controlling the attributions others make.

The motivation of actors to manipulate the impressions formed of them is suggested by a basic premise of symbolic interactionism: '[H]uman beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them' (Blumer 1969: 2). Thus, a means of influencing the actions of others is affecting the meanings they assign to social objects. By 'taking the role of the other' – namely 'using symbols to put oneself in another's place and to view the world as others do' (Stryker 1980: 62) – self-presenting actors are able to determine and project the appropriate image for the desired effect (Snyder 1977: 117).

Beyond these basic principles, Tedeschi and Riess (1981) review several explanations for self-presentation that can be surmised from the literature, of which two appear to be more directly relevant to public diplomacy. The first is called the 'predicaments framework' of impression management. It proceeds from the assumption that social rewards and punishments are a function of how responsibility is attributed for the positive or negative consequences of actions. Given that actors seek to avoid punishment and obtain rewards, they have an incentive to manipulate the attribution of responsibility and the perception of consequences of significant others. Thus, a 'predicament of image protection' occurs when the public image of the actor is under threat of being

held responsible for negative consequences (and thus blamed); a 'predicament of image enhancement', on the other hand, occurs when due credit for positive consequences is under threat of denial.⁸ From these two predicaments, the logic of self-presentation strategies can be derived as either addressing the attribution of responsibility or the perception of consequences, or both (Tedeschi & Riess 1981: 5–10).

A second, more general explanation of self-presentation suggests that the attainment of *social power* is the major drive for the manipulation of impressions. Tedeschi and Norman (1985: 293) provide the following argument:

Self-presentations are attempts to influence others to perceive the actor as having a particular identity. Actors aspire to attain identities that serve to facilitate the effectiveness of more direct forms of influence, such as persuasion, threats and promises. This chain of events, including self-presentations, the establishment of identities and the subsequent effects of those identities on the social influence process, places impression management firmly in the realm of social power.

In this conception, then, identity is a *power resource*, and behavior designed to obtain or augment power by manipulating others' perceptions of identities is *strategic* self-presentation (Jones & Pittman 1982).⁹ Social influence theory has found that trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, status, credibility and prestige are some of the notable characteristics that constitute power resources (e.g., Hovland et al. 1953; French & Raven 1959; Tedeschi et al. 1970; Fiske & Taylor 1990; Rafaeli & Harness 2002).

Although Tedeschi and Riess (1981) present the 'predicaments' and 'social power' explanations of self-presentation as distinct, the identity component could actually serve to integrate them: self-presentation could be seen as aimed initially at inducing a certain identity attribution for social power purposes; however, once an actor has been successful in establishing the desired identity (and presumably enjoys the power dividends that such an identity brings), then he or she would try to prevent damage to the identity in 'identity threatening situations' and to support and maintain it in 'identity enhancing situations.'

This instrumental view of identity projection may seem to imply an exaggerated degree of manipulability, as well as the prevalence of deception.¹⁰ This is why in Jones and Pittman's (1982: 235; emphasis added) scheme, the role of intervening factors is spelled out:

The linkage of a particular power motive with the self-presentational features of social behavior is *mediated* by cognitive processes in the

self-presenting actor. The behavior is further shaped by evaluative or moral constraints. The complex interaction of motive, cognition and morality determines the choice of self-presentational strategies.

This argument *contextualizes* self-presentation by situating it within a power, strategic and moral matrix. Thus, when opportunities for power augmentation or threats of power reduction arise, the choice and application of self-presentation is constrained by pressures towards self-consistency (or conformity of the presented self with the 'phenomenal self'¹¹) and by social norms governing the limits of image manipulation. This idea is captured by the concept of 'perceived legitimacy' (Jones & Pittman 1982: 237).

Public diplomacy as self-presentation

Manheim (1990: 4) defines public diplomacy as 'efforts by the government of one nation to influence public or elite opinion in a second nation for the purpose of turning the foreign policy of the target nation to advantage'. This formulation omits the *persuasive* nature of the interaction, as well as its channel and form; these are addressed by another influential definition (Tuch 1990: 3), which loses, however, Manheim's emphasis on intended foreign policy effects: 'a government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies'. The two definitions also reflect a common distinction between public diplomacy's short-term, current affairs focus and its long-term, culture-based activities (see Signitzer & Coombs 1992: 140; Gilboa 1998: 58; Leonard et al. 2002: 10–11).

Given the discussion in the previous section and the elements highlighted by the two definitions, *it is possible to view public diplomacy as a specific form of impression management by the state in which self-presentation is used for social influence, communication is direct and means are persuasive*. Although characterizing public diplomacy in these terms seems unproblematic, applying a psychological theory about individuals and their social interactions to the world of corporate agents such as states requires justification. The broad defense of this practice is, as Jepperson et al. (1996: 59) contend, that 'nations do construct and project collective identities, and states operate as actors'.¹² More specifically in our case, when public diplomacy is viewed as a communications act, it can be analyzed and explained as individual self-presentation because both the communicators and the audiences tend to anthropomorphize the state. The images that foreign publics have of nations other than their own are mostly unitary, highly simplified and reified; in other words, there is a

tendency to associate individual-level characteristics (of the sort that impression management seeks to induce) with integral collectivities.¹³ The theoretical pitfalls of anthropomorphizing the state (see Wendt 1999: 221–224) are of no concern to the target audiences of national self-presentation. Accordingly, the planners of public diplomacy campaigns design the message and present the national ‘self’ to the world in terms that are likewise easily comprehended and retained by foreign publics. Thus, at both ends of the communications process the thinking tends to conform to the individual-level categories of the psychological theory.¹⁴

Although public diplomacy takes on various forms (see Leonard et al. 2002), this article focuses on *propaganda wars* that are waged when two states seek to outdo each other in the domestic arena of a third (and more powerful) actor by winning the support of its public. A greater public understanding for the perspective, policy preferences and behavior of one of the two competing states would enable that actor to enhance its influence over the policy of the target state. The opposing public diplomacy campaigns of Britain and Germany to affect American neutrality in both world wars are notable examples of this type of conflict (see Roetter 1974; Kunczik 1997; Cull 1995). Rhetorical strategies in the recent Israeli-Palestinian propaganda war are examined later in this article.

In a setting of competitive self-presentation, the objective of achieving the desirable attribution with the public of the target state must be pursued in the context of similar counter-efforts by an opponent. What makes this context strategic is that each actor has partial control over the final outcome – the image of the competitors in foreign public opinion – and therefore must take the actions of the other into account. In this situation, self-presentation may also consist of strategies designed to promote a negative image of the opponent. Indeed, if one of the actors resorts to such a negative campaign and appears to be successful, the other actor may be forced into a defensive strategy, attempting to protect its image against further deterioration. The possibility of enhancing one’s image by attacking the other, and the threat of being under such an attack, can be classified, respectively, into what were referred to previously as ‘identity-enhancing situations’ and ‘identity-threatening situations’.¹⁵

Thus, when self-presentation is competitive and interactive, it cannot be captured by classifications that focus only on the self-presenter and the target audience; rather, the analysis of self-presentation should be based on an explicit acknowledgment of an opponent, its behavior and the attribution it evokes in the target audience. This proposition underlies the structure of Table 1, which depicts the determinants of identity predicaments in a competitive setting. When such a setting pertains to a propaganda war, the

Table 1. Determinants of identity predicaments in a competitive setting

	Negative attribution in target	Positive attribution in target
Self behavior	Identity-threatening situation	Identity-enhancing situation
Opponent's behavior	Identity-enhancing situation	Identity-threatening situation

Table 2. Self-presentation tactics employed in each type of identity predicament

	Negative attribution in target	Positive attribution in target
Self behavior	Identity threatening situation: <i>blame avoidance</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid/reduce responsibility and/or • Reduce negativeness of actions and/or outcomes Tactics: denial, reframing, dissociation, justification, excuses, concessions	Identity enhancing situation: <i>credit gain</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain responsibility and/or • Increase positiveness of actions and/or outcomes Tactics: entitlings, enhancements
Opponent's behavior	Identity enhancing situation: <i>blame imposition</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impose or increase responsibility of opponent and/or • Increase negativeness of opponent's actions and/or outcomes Tactics: association, delegitimization, offensive reframing	Identity threatening situation: <i>credit denial</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deny or minimize responsibility of opponent and/or • Reduce positiveness of opponent's actions and/or outcomes Tactics: offensive dissociation, offensive reframing

zero-sumness of the interaction is also assumed. Thus, an actor may confront an identity-threatening situation when its behavior (presentational or non-presentational) effects a negative attribution in the target, or when the behavior of the *opponent* effects a positive attribution. Identity-enhancing situations arise when the actor's behavior leads to a positive attribution or when the opponent's behavior results in a negative one.

Once a situation is perceived as either identity-enhancing or identity-threatening, then a predicaments framework can be introduced to organize the observation of behavior and to develop theoretical expectations about its choice. Table 2 provides the details on self-presentation tactics that are expected to be employed in each type of identity predicament. The predica-

ments framework, as discussed by Tedeschi and Riess (1981), focuses on the first row of the table – namely on situations that are associated (justly or not) with the actor's own behavior. To their presentation we may add the possibility depicted by the lower half of the table – namely that in a competitive context, the behavior of the *opponent* can be identity enhancing or threatening for the actor. Table 2 incorporates this possibility and suggests that self-presenting actors would confront it with a similar attention to the attribution of responsibility and the evaluation of consequences, but this time with respect to the opponent.¹⁶

Table 2 shows that within a strategic context, actors have four basic strategies, two for each identity-related situation. First, if the identity of the actor is under threat as a result of its own behavior, then the actor is likely to employ *blame avoidance*. As noted above, this can be done by addressing the responsibility and/or the action or outcome components of blame. Schutz (1998) discusses six tactics of defensive self-presentation, which are also listed in Table 2. These tactics can be interpreted in terms of the specific component of blame that they address when the actor attempts to avoid or reduce blame (see Table 3). Second, if the identity of the actor is under threat as a result of an identity-enhancing situation for the opponent, then the actor is likely to engage in a strategy of *credit denial*, with its attendant tactics of *offensive dissociation* (addressing responsibility) and *offensive reframing* (addressing action and/or outcome). Third, if the actor is in a predicament of image enhancement as a result of its own behavior, then the actor is likely to resort to a strategy of *credit gain*, with its attendant tactics of *entitlements* (addressing responsibility) and *enhancements* (addressing action and/or outcome) (Tedeschi & Riess 1981). And fourth, if the actor is in a predicament of image enhancement as a result of an opportunity provided by an identity-threatening situation for the opponent, then the actor is likely to apply the strategy of *blame imposition*, with its attendant tactics of *association* (addressing responsibility), *delegitimization* (addressing action) and *offensive reframing* (addressing outcome), as shown in Table 3.

Aside from the idiosyncratic features of specific propaganda campaigns, there are several variables that generally mediate the relationship between social situations and self-presentation, even if we assume a fixed social-power motivation (hence the probabilistic language of the above propositions). Self-presentation theory, as noted earlier, points to the 'phenomenal self' and to 'perceived legitimacy' as mediating factors. With respect to public diplomacy, the first concept may refer to a state's identity in world politics as perceived (in non-strategic terms) by those entrusted with and in charge of presenting this identity. As with individuals in society where 'other people, in their attempt to render *their* social environment more predictable, endow us with stable

Table 3. Tactics of blame reduction (BR) and blame imposition (BI)

Tactic	Typical statement	Blame component addressed:		
		Responsibility	Action	Outcome
Denial	'It did not happen'	Challenge	Challenge	Challenge
Reframing (BR)	'It was different'; 'it wasn't so bad'	Accept	Accept	Challenge
Offensive reframing (BI)	'It was different'; 'It was bad/worse'	Accept	Challenge	Accept
Dissociation (BR)	'It wasn't us'	Challenge	Accept	Accept
Association (BI)	'It was them'; 'they are responsible'			
Justification (BR)	'It was legitimate'	Accept		
Delegitimization (BI)	'Their actions were not legitimate'		Challenge	Accept
Excuses (non-dispositional attribution)	'We had no choice'; 'they left us no alternative'	Challenge	Accept	Accept
Concessions, apologies, and remediation	'We're sorry'; 'forgive us'	Accept	Accept	Accept

Notes: The defensive tactics are listed in Schutz (1998), but they are not interpreted in terms of the blame components shown here.

'Responsibility' is defined according to Heider's principles of responsibility attribution, which consist of three components: the person '(a) could have reasonably foreseen the consequences of behavior; (b) intended to produce those consequences; and (c) was not forced, pressured, or constrained by circumstances or other factors in the situation' (Tedeschi & Riess 1981: 6).

attributes and respond to us as enduring structures' (Jones & Pittman 1982: 232; emphasis in original), so does an integral and consistent awareness of who (or what) the state is in international society arise from its interaction with, and treatment by, other states. Norms of consistency also constrain the extent to which the presented self can deviate from the phenomenal self ('perceived legitimacy'), which means that states must temper the strategic element in their public diplomacy by the requirement to maintain credibility, both domestically and internationally. Given media-generated transparency, this requirement reduces the range of feasible self-presentation strategies (and strongly favors some tactics over others).

These factors are mentioned only for the sake of providing a complete description of the theoretical framework. The propositions specified in Table 2 are based on the working assumption that none of these factors is strong enough to systematically tilt the hypothesized relationship between predicaments and strategy choice. Future theoretical development, however, would need to translate these mediating factors into sets of conditions that promote or discourage certain types of self-presentation strategies and their associated tactics. Of similar concern to theory is the fact that public diplomacy is embedded within the broader context of foreign policy. Thus, just as the response of individuals to identity predicaments does not consist of presentational elements only, so must one consider, when theorizing at the state level, that because propaganda is but a component in grand strategy, non-presentational considerations (e.g., security) can further skew the empirical relationship between predicaments and propaganda (see Mor 2006). Clearly, comprehensive explanations of propaganda behavior would have to endogenize such influences, which in turn calls for incorporating what George (1959: 49) has called an elite's 'operational propaganda theory' – namely a 'regime's evaluation of the capabilities and limitations of propaganda as an instrument of policy and its estimate of the prerequisites for successful propaganda'.

Self-presentation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

This section presents a case study of Israeli and Palestinian public diplomacy as it was conducted on the Internet during the recent round of hostilities known as the 'Al Aqsa intifada', which began in late September 2000.¹⁷ While applying force and violence against each other to further their goals, both sides also made an intense effort to win over foreign public opinion, especially in the United States. Consistent with a social-power interpretation of self-presentation, the public diplomacy campaign of both parties reflected a strong

(though not symmetric) political and economic dependence on the United States. Given the role of public opinion in American foreign policy, public diplomacy became an important means of gaining influence with the United States government.¹⁸

The case study was conducted as a *plausibility probe*. Following Eckstein (1975), its objective at this initial stage of theory development was not to provide a definitive test; it was, rather, to evaluate the plausibility, or potential validity, of the framework and its theoretical arguments in one empirical case of self-presentation, prior to undertaking a more comprehensive and rigorous test. Accordingly, texts in official websites were coded for self-presentation strategies and tactics in order to determine if the predicaments framework captures, and is sufficiently exhaustive of, the empirical content of the texts, and if this content is in fact associated with the predicament conditions specified by the theory. The following is a brief description of the assumptions that guided the design of the case study.

The source of the texts to be coded were the official Internet websites of the two sides: for Israel, the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;¹⁹ for the PA, the website of the International Press Center of the State Information Service²⁰ and the website of the Negotiations Affairs Department.²¹ In order to limit the time period and range of events to be analyzed, and in order to achieve a reasonable level of comparability in the context and substance of the selected texts, the analysis focused on the period and issues raised by Israel's 'Operation Defensive Shield' (March–April 2002), especially the events that took place in the Jenin refugee camp. Given the exploratory nature of the case study, no attempt was made at this stage necessarily to derive a representative sample from the population of official web pages. Instead, the texts selected for coding (200 pages in total: 110 for Israel and 90 for the Palestinians) were those that were featured most prominently (i.e., situated highest in the organizational hierarchy of their respective website) among the documents dealing with the relevant events (and which were therefore the documents most likely to be accessed).

A content analysis protocol was developed for coding self-presentation themes, consisting of categories of strategies and their associated tactics (some of which are shown in Table 3).²² The protocol also called for the identification of pertinent themes not anticipated by the theory. Coding was conducted by the researcher (on the whole sample) and an assistant (on a random subsample), working independently. Intercoder reliability, using Scott's pi, was 87 per cent when coding for strategies only, and 82 per cent when coding for tactics as well.

Another task for the empirical analysis was to provide an operational meaning for the term 'predicaments'. This was done by assuming that, given

Israeli and Palestinian dependence on the United States, predicaments in the field of public diplomacy derive from an actor's standing, differentiated by political issue, in American public opinion. Specifically, an identity-threatening issue is one over which a plurality of opinion (at a minimum) opposes an actor's (perceived) current behavior or policy, whereas an identity-enhancing issue is one over which the actor has the *potential* to obtain majority support but currently does not (as is implied by the concept of a 'predicament of image enhancement').²³ In competitive self-presentation, given the nearly zero-sum nature of most key issues in the current case study, we assume simply that when the opponent's own behavior poses a threat to its image with respect to a given issue, then that issue provides the actor with an opportunity for image enhancement – and vice versa.

As a benchmark for the current study, the poll findings of *The Program on International Policy Attitudes* (PIPA) at the University of Maryland were consulted in order to define the identity-threatening and identity-enhancing issues for Israel and the Palestinian Authority.²⁴ According to the findings of the poll and the criteria specified above, predicaments (per issue) were defined as follows: for the Israelis, identity-threatening situations were associated with their own 'use of military force' and with the Palestinian '(non-violent) resistance to occupation'; identity-enhancing situations for the Israelis were associated with their own 'struggle against terrorism' and with the Palestinians' 'use of terrorism'. In the case of the Palestinian Authority, these classifications were simply reversed.²⁵

The results of the coding provide ample evidence on the application of the self-presentation strategies and tactics discussed in this article and their association with specific issues invoked by the two sides in their Internet propaganda campaigns. The following is a sample of such rhetoric, arranged according to the categories of Tables 1 and 2. All data are derived from coding done on the Internet websites mentioned above (which are also the source for the following sample quotes).

Israel

For Israel, the 'use of military force' against the Palestinians was an identity-threatening issue in American public opinion, and it consequently triggered a strategy of *blame avoidance*, addressing responsibility, action and outcomes (see Table 3). Responsibility was challenged by means of two tactics, the first being *denial*, with Israel rejecting the Palestinian claim that a massacre had been committed in Jenin. The second tactic was *non-dispositional attribution*,

by which the military operation was presented as an external constraint: 'Israel was forced to defend itself'; Israel 'was left with no choice but to react through military means'; 'Israeli Defense Forces [IDF] were forced to operate in densely populated areas'; and so on.

To reduce the perceived negativity of the action, rhetoric consisted of *justification* and *reframing*: 'Every state, including Israel, has the right to self-defense'; 'All civilized nations would act in a similar fashion given these circumstances' (justification). 'Assassinations' and 'extra-judicial killings' were presented as pejorative Palestinian terms for 'justified counter-terrorist operations' in a situation of armed confrontation. The latter term was also used to frame the objective of the operation (reframing). To reduce the perceived negativity of outcomes, Israel challenged the casualty figures published by the PA, claiming they were much lower, and reframed them (enhancing justification) by arguing that 'these were largely armed fighters, killed during combat'.

The Israeli response to threats associated with support for the opponent consisted of *credit denial* (see lower right-hand section of Table 2): in order to address credit claimed by the Palestinians for 'resisting occupation/Israeli use of force', the Israeli rhetoric sought to reduce the perceived positiveness of the Palestinian action by arguing that there was no 'Jeningrad', as the Palestinians referred to their stance in the refugee camp.

Turning to identity-enhancing issues, the propaganda strategy was aimed at *credit gain* for self-behavior (see upper right-hand section of Table 2) on the issue of 'fighting terrorism', by attempting to increase the perceived positiveness of the action and its outcome (*enhancement*): 'The IDF took maximum care to prevent harm to Palestinian civilians, often risking the lives of its soldiers to do so'; during and after the operation, 'Israelis enjoyed a period of relative calm', with 'many civilian lives . . . saved by the IDF operation'.

Majority opposition in public opinion to the opponent's 'terrorism' provided an identity-enhancing opportunity, which Israeli rhetoric sought to exploit by means of *blame imposition* (see lower left-hand section of Table 2). This strategy consisted of, first, increasing the responsibility of the opponent for the action and outcome (*association*) ('Responsibility for these casualties lies with the Palestinian authority, which has initiated the violence and stubbornly refuses to bring it to an end'; the 'armed terrorists' chose the Jenin refugee camp 'to serve as a battleground against Israeli forces', and 'acted with no regard for the safety of the camp's inhabitants or their property'), and second, increasing the perceived negativity of the outcome (*offensive reframing*) (in March 2002 alone, 'Palestinian terrorists killed more than 130 people in Israel' – proportionally, this would equal 'over six thousand Americans killed').

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

For the PA, ‘terrorism against Israeli citizens’ was an identity-threatening issue in American public opinion, to which the response was *blame avoidance* or reduction, addressing responsibility and action (see upper left-hand section of Table 2). Responsibility was challenged by means of *non-dispositional attribution*, with rhetoric pointing to Likud leader Ariel Sharon’s visit to Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount), and the subsequent use of lethal force by Israeli police against unarmed Palestinian protesters, as the immediate cause of the uprising.²⁶ The underlying cause was the lack of progress in the peace process and ‘a steady deterioration in the quality of Palestinian daily life’. Responsibility for ‘terrorism’ was addressed by means of *dissociation* and *non-dispositional attribution*, with the PA arguing that it ‘exerted 100 percent effort . . . to prevent terrorist operations’, but was not free to operate due to Israeli closures, sanctions and violence. Likewise, ‘there have been a number of non-violent demonstrations . . . All of these demonstrations have been met with violent responses by Israel’, even when the protesters were Israeli civilians. In the context in which they appeared, these arguments were defensive, invoking situational factors attributed to Israel that were said to have severely restricted Palestinian alternatives to, and countermeasures against, terrorism.²⁷

The PA resorted to *credit denial* in order to cope with threats emanating from public support for the opponent’s ‘fight against terrorism’ (see lower right-hand section of Table 2). The tactic used was *offensive reframing*, designed to present an alternative, negative interpretation of Israel’s actions and their consequences. Thus, the Palestinians argued that the Jenin camp was not a ‘terrorist camp’, but a ‘community of human beings living in want, and in very difficult circumstances’. A photograph showing digging at a mass grave carried the caption ‘What passes these days for a “war against terror”’; a hyperlink and webpage were titled ‘Israeli state terrorism’; and the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) was referred to as ‘IOF’ (‘Israeli *Occupation* Forces’).

Majority opposition to Israel’s ‘occupation and settlements’ and ‘use of military force’ – identity-enhancing issues for the PA – were exploited by means of *blame imposition* (see lower right-hand section of Table 2).²⁸ The PA sought to increase the perceived negativity of Israel’s actions and resulting outcomes by pointing to the behavior of the IDF in the Jenin refugee camp: ‘The situation in the center of this West Bank city . . . was akin to an earthquake’; ‘No warning was given before houses were bulldozed with people inside’ (*offensive reframing*). ‘Israeli army may have bent all recognized rules of warfare during its operation here’, and, more broadly, the ‘Israeli atrocious military offensive’ was aimed at ‘uprooting the Palestinian people from their own land and obliteration [*sic*] of its identity’ (*delegitimization*).

In addition to the tactics anticipated by the theory, the analysis of both parties' web pages also suggested the use of another tactic – *self-validation* (Rafaeli & Harness, 2002) – as a means of projecting credibility. A precondition for the effectiveness of the rhetorical tactics discussed above is that actors marshal evidence to substantiate the claims they make with respect to responsibility and actions/outcomes – both theirs and the opponent's.²⁹ Israel argued, for example, that 'respectable news outlets the world over finally confirmed what Israel had stated from the beginning – that there had been no massacre in Jenin', and cited the report by the United Nations Secretary General that acquitted Israel of such a crime. The Palestinians, in response, stated that 'the Jenin UN report is a bouquet of flowers presented to the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his squadron', calling it 'a report that exposes a dying organization'. To buttress their version of the events in Jenin, the Palestinians referenced and cited various human rights and international aid organizations, and called for a validation opportunity: an investigation by a neutral third party (to which Israel was opposed).

Conclusions

This article has argued that public diplomacy can be seen as a specific form of self-presentation in which impression management through direct communication and persuasive means is used for social influence. When projected identities come under threat, actors resort to various rhetorical tactics (designed to reduce blame or gain credit) in order to escape their predicaments. In propaganda wars, the source of predicaments expands to include the effect on a foreign audience not only of *self*-presentation (and actions), but also of an opponent's presentation. In these situations, which are often zero-sum contests, the rhetoric of public diplomacy also consists of tactics designed to impose blame or deny credit.

A preliminary empirical study of these ideas has proven very promising. Working from an operational definition and measurement of identity predicaments, the coded texts addressing them were found to consist of the rhetorical strategies and tactics predicted by the theory. Moreover, an *exhaustive* thematic coding of the sample texts showed that the rhetoric of self- and other-presentation encompassed a significant portion of the propaganda rhetoric. This included, however, some strategies and tactics that were not anticipated by the theory – most notably self-validation, which served both as a response to credibility predicaments and as an enhancement to other strategies. 'Credibility battles' (to further extend the military metaphor) deserve much closer attention

as a component of propaganda wars since the growing proliferation of news sources invites constant public bickering about the accuracy of various reports.

Two substantive questions emanate from this study and call for additional empirical work: Does the rhetoric of national self-presentation, in particular the predicaments framework of impression management, apply across time and space as the 'stuff' of which propaganda wars are made? And do states respond to predicaments in predictable and stable ways – namely with strategies that can be theoretically specified? To answer these questions, a full-fledged, structured and comparative case study should be conducted, which is based on the analysis of additional media, the use of representative samples, the development of quantitative measures (e.g., to assess the percentage of total text devoted to self-presentation, and the incidence and prominence of specific strategies and tactics) and the application of process tracing to isolate the impact of predicaments on presentational decisions.

A notable advantage of the self-presentation perspective on public diplomacy is that it establishes a clear relationship between power relations and rhetorical interaction, which prevents the artificial isolation of the rhetorical realm from the more general political context in which states interact. This context, as noted in the theoretical section, defines a broader agenda for the study of public diplomacy and includes: the state-level equivalents of 'the phenomenal self' and 'perceived legitimacy,' in particular domestic public opinion and the transparency generated by the new media; the incorporation of propaganda into grand strategy and the resulting interplay between hard and soft power; and the impact – expected and realized – that public diplomacy campaigns have on the target audience.³⁰ Self-presentation theory can contribute insights into all three aspects of public diplomacy and provide a framework within which they can be integrated.

Notes

1. Such has been the case in the West and the United States after each major conflict, as McLaurin (1982: 276) notes.
2. *The 9/11 Commission Report* (22 July 2004), p. 377. Available online at: www.9-11commission.gov (accessed 30 September 2004).
3. This focus was an antidote to realism's exclusive grounding in the hard, 'objective' facts of power, though some notable realists did acknowledge the importance of a *reputation* for power (Morgenthau & Thompson 1985; Herz 1981: 187). Earlier on, E. H. Carr (1964) defined propaganda, or 'power over opinion', as one of the three faces of political power in international relations.
4. These concepts are discussed in March and Olsen (1989: 21–26).
5. Given its basic characteristics, 'public diplomacy' is but a euphemism for 'propaganda', especially when considering that the recent scholarly literature on the latter concept has

stripped it of its unethical connotations (e.g., Jowett & O'Donnell 1992: 4; Taylor 1995: 8; but see Cunningham 2002). A different evaluation of public diplomacy is offered in Manheim (1994: 132); Nye (2004: 107).

6. As Snyder (1977: 120) explains: 'In some circumstances we are persuaded by our own appearances: we become the persons we appear to be. This is particularly likely to occur when the image we present wins the approval and favor of those around us' (see also Schlenker 1980)
7. Self-presentation and impression management are closely related, but not identical (see Schneider 1981: 25).
8. A similar logic, based however on individual-level biological needs, underlies Bloom's (1990: 79) theory of national identity.
9. Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) make a further distinction between strategic and tactical impression management.
10. At the individual level, most self-presentation strategies are indeed learned, internalized, adaptive responses. Self-conscious strategy adoption is typical of non-routine situations (Jones & Pittman 1982: 232–233, 258) – as is the planning of public diplomacy campaigns.
11. Jones and Pittman (1982: 232), following Jones and Gerard, define this concept as 'a person's awareness, arising out of interactions with his environment, of his own beliefs, values, attitudes, the links between them, and their implications for his behavior'. They attribute the social desirability of consistency to the role it plays in rendering the social environment more predictable.
12. Discussion of the philosophical underpinnings of this statement can be found in Wendt (1999: Chapter 5); Bloom (1990: Chapters 3, 4).
13. Kunczik (1997: 37–58), following Boulding (1956), discusses the cognitive and social determinants of national stereotypes (see also White 1965).
14. Small-group authorship and management of government websites reinforces further the centralization and integration of messages. When this is not the case, it is still possible to apply the theory at a lower level of analysis, then to investigate the impact that diffuse communications or multiple self-presentations have on the image of 'the state' abroad.
15. For a recent typology of self-presentation that incorporates the distinction between assertive and defensive tactics, see Schutz (1998).
16. Schutz (1998) discusses a group of tactics where one is 'trying to look good by making others look bad'. These tactics belong in the broader category of 'offensive self-presentation' designed to create a positive impression. Table 2, relying on a predicaments framework, associates such tactics with situations that are created by the opponent's behavior.
17. The fact that this is not an interstate conflict as such does not detract from its utility as a case study since the theory presented here is equally applicable to governments and to nongovernmental organizations, provided there is an official, deliberate attempt to shape the image of the organization in foreign public opinion, which has certainly been an activity carried out by the Palestinian Authority (as is the case, e.g., with Al Quaida's propaganda).
18. Whether the parties' beliefs on the influence of public opinion were valid or not is a different matter. For the scholarly state of knowledge on this issue, see the recent review by Gilboa (2005).
19. www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/home.asp (accessed 22 March 2003).
20. www.ipc.gov.ps/ (accessed 27 March 2003).

21. www.nad-plo.org/ (accessed 27 March 2003). Although the Internet websites were not necessarily targeted at a specific national audience, the assumption was that obtaining the support of American public opinion – more than any other audience – was of vital importance to both sides.
22. The protocol is available from the author upon request.
23. In future research, it may be possible to associate degrees of threat and opportunity with the extent of support or opposition in public opinion.
24. See www.pipa.org/index.html and the study of American public attitudes on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at: www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/IsrPalConflict/overview.html. The poll was conducted in May 2002 and published in early December; thus, it was carried out in the context of Israel's 'Operation Defensive Shield' (launched on 29 March 2002) and the controversy surrounding the nature of that operation in the Jenin refugee camp. The advantage of the poll for the current study was the substance and specificity of its questions, which addressed various issues involved in the operation. Rigorous testing would require establishing reliability by consulting additional surveys.
25. The issues are given in quotation marks to indicate their potential perception in *American* public opinion.
26. 'Uprising' and 'terrorism' were not equated in the Palestinian site, but it seems that defensive self-presentation was nevertheless applied to the former as well.
27. However, these arguments shade into blame imposition as a *tactic* of blame avoidance (as distinct from a strategy unto itself), seen, e.g., in the Palestinian claim that Israel 'carried out the very actions that lead to terrorist and other violent operations in the first place'. The difference is subtle and depends on context: whether the actor is defending against an accusation or exploiting such a predicament for the opponent. The coding protocol currently does not enable such a distinction.
28. No cases of credit gain for *self*-behavior were identified in the coded pages. However, in the context of their response to accusations of terrorism, the Palestinians buttressed their blame-reduction strategy with arguments that could be interpreted as entitlings and enhancements (e.g., 'there have been a number of non-violent demonstrations . . .'). As indicated in Note 27 above with respect to blame imposition, this distinction is not yet reflected in the codebook.
29. The failure of self-validation plagued and undermined the American and British self-presentation strategies in the Iraq War.
30. See Manheim (1990) for an attempt to evaluate the success of public diplomacy by means of content analysis of news items in the daily press.

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