

## **Exploring Message Targeting at Home and Abroad: The Role of Political and Media Considerations in the Rhetorical Dynamics of Conflict Resolution**

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Targeting messages on sensitive, conflict-related issues while mediating between disparate audience expectations presents a significant risk to the image and interests of political actors. This study provides a basis for understanding the factors that impact a politician's choice between using message consistencies or gaps and discusses their consequences for conflict resolution processes. Based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of 644 messages presented by Israeli officials with respect to the Israeli–Arab conflict and Israeli–Palestinian conflict over three different periods (1967–73; 1993–2000; 2009–12), the study points to foreign relations defined by the existence of negotiations rather than mediatization processes as the significant factor that impacts the rhetorical dynamics of conflict resolution negotiations, due to the amplified pressures of a two-level game during periods of rapprochement.

*Keywords: Israeli–Palestinian conflict, mediatization, message, negotiation, rhetoric*

The need to satisfy disparate audience demands is a prominent feature of peace communication. This premise is most famously articulated by Secretary of State Kissinger's concept of "constructive ambiguity" (United States Institute of Peace, 2011), referring to the deliberate use of ambiguous language on sensitive issues to advance conflict resolution. However, targeting messages on conflict-related issues to distinct audiences presents a unique rhetorical demand for political leaders beyond the mere use of ambiguity: They must determine the extent to which consistent or disparate messages are to be presented to domestic and foreign audiences.

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Targeting consistent messages both to domestic and foreign audiences would appear to be the safest option for politicians seeking to maintain coherent political face, as consistent messages present politicians as trustworthy actors (Chilton, 1990) whose actions and beliefs follow basic principles (Duranti, 2006). However, within the context of international conflict and conflict resolution, the presentation of consistent messages over variant geographic settings presents a risk. Although domestic audiences generally demand that politicians present messages that reflect a consensual, patriotic national interest, foreign audiences demand messages designed toward flexibility and concessions (Friedman & Kampf, 2014; Putnam, 1988). By ignoring either demand, political leaders can impair both the need to foster domestic solidarity and the need to promote political alignment with other states' interests by presenting values that resonate with foreign audiences. The need to resonate with the values of foreign audiences, essential to the public diplomacy effort (Entman, 2008) coupled with the contradictory need to express national sentiments, results in an inherent trade-off (Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009). The conflicting receiver steering (Hjarvard, 2013) of audiences who have oppositional demands can result in politicians creating message gaps.

However, targeting disparate messages to foreign and domestic audiences entails potential damage to a politician's consistent self-image (Neuman & Tabak, 2003). In the past, national leaders could design inconsistent messages for specific audiences with less fear that such messages could be broadcast across geographical locations; in the age of a globalized media environment, domestic audiences become "overhearers" of foreign targeted messages and vice versa. This situation reduces political leaders' rhetorical maneuverability: They cannot present disparate messages to different audiences while maintaining a consistent image. Thus, politicians face an avoidance dilemma (Bavelas, Black, Chovil, & Mullett, 1990), as both consistent and inconsistent messages can threaten their interests and efforts to maintain credibility.

As the factors that determine a politician's choice between message gaps or consistencies have yet to be examined, this study tackles the somewhat neglected question of why politicians choose to design messages in specific ways. Although there has been significant research dedicated to deciphering the impact of media and politicians on the public, too little focus has been given to the factors that shape how politicians design and target messages to audiences. Using case-oriented research, we examine the relative impact of political versus media considerations on the rhetorical design of messages delivered in domestic versus foreign contexts. We focus on one main overarching question: To what extent can gaps and consistencies between foreign-targeted and domestic-targeted political messages be attributed to one of the following factors: (1) the prevalent media environment (i.e., the extent to which a preglobalized, national media environment vs. a globalized media system impacts gaps and consistencies) or (2) the nature of relations with the other party to the conflict (i.e., the extent to which the existence of negotiations toward conflict resolution or lack thereof impacts gaps and consistencies)?

In the following, we review the literature dealing with these factors. We then offer quantitative and qualitative content analysis of public messages delivered by Israeli leaders that deal with the core issues of the Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian conflict over three periods, each with a unique deployment of media and political characteristics. We conclude by discussing how media considerations and the nature of relations with the other party to a conflict contribute to the rhetorical dynamics of

message gaps and consistencies as well as the consequences of these dynamics on conflict transformation.

### **Message Design and Targeting in the Era of Mediatization**

The first conceptual framework for understanding why political leaders use message gaps and consistencies can be found in the process of mediatization, the long-term structural transformation of relationships between media, culture, and society (Stromback, 2008). Mediatization refers to an omnipresence of media as a multidirectional, structural condition for social practices (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). Following the spread of the Internet and satellite television, media played a major role in “de-territorializing” social interaction (Tomlinson, 1999). This transformation results in significant cultural reflectivity, as few cultures can develop in isolation, causing two parallel phenomena: (1) globalized media allow text and images to easily flow across national boundaries; (2) conversely, access to highly specified interactive media results in a segmentation of societies (Hjarvard, 2013).

These phenomena have consequences for the formation of politics: The supremacy of *media logic* (the domination of social processes by news value and storytelling techniques) over *political logic* (the domination of social processes by authoritative decision making) affects how political actors maneuver (Stromback, 2008). Media logic has also been conceived in highly capitalist terms as *market logic*, in which audience or “receiver steering” are viewed as key impacting factors in message design (Hjarvard, 2013). One form of adapting to media logic can be found in politicians phrasing public statements in terms that polarize the issue to facilitate gaining media coverage (Hjarvard, 2013). Alternatively, politicians employ various discursive strategies to present equivocal messages to suit conflicting audience demands (Friedman & Kampf, 2014; Sheaffer & Shenhav, 2009). In context of a mediatized society in which cultures cannot exist in isolation, political leaders attempt to design messages that resonate with audience demands in variant cultures.

Therefore, we offer the following premise regarding how the media environment impacts the rhetorical dynamics of messages in the context of conflict resolution: A preglobal media environment corresponds with the tendency of politicians to employ message gaps, as, within such a context, a leader has the ability to speak to specifically defined audiences, with less risk of overhearers. Conversely, a globalized, fragmentary media environment resulting in a highly mediatized society is linked to message consistency, following the expectation that a message delivered to a specific audience will be potentially reported on a global level. If this premise is shown to be false—that is, if a globalized media does not correspond to message consistency—we must look toward other explanations to account for the dynamics of message design.

### **Foreign Relations and Message Design and Targeting**

An alternative explanation to our research question can be found in the nature of foreign relations with the other party to the conflict (i.e., the extent to which the existence of negotiations toward conflict resolution or lack thereof impacts message design and targeting). We take as our starting point Putnam’s (1988) theory of a two-level game. Putnam argues that during international negotiations, politicians

constantly attempt to balance between foreign and domestic demands. They seek to maintain power by building coalitions and adopting policies favorable to various domestic pressure groups while attempting to minimize the adverse consequences of foreign developments by engaging positively with international expectations. Since every country is both interdependent and sovereign, neither of these two games can be ignored, as national leaders must conceive of themselves as playing at both game boards simultaneously. Putnam's theory does not just examine how one sphere impacts the other but also accounts for areas of "entanglement" (Putnam, 1988, p. 430) between them. Although political leaders are constantly playing a two-level game, the conflicting demands of each "game board" are amplified during negotiations toward conflict resolution, especially when the demands of domestic pressure groups stand at odds with international demands (Barnett, 1999). While, as Putnam claims, there is a great incentive for consistency at the two game boards, the oppositional nature of demands during negotiations may cause politicians to design messages specifically to each audience to "disentangle" the two game boards. Thus, our second premise with respect to rhetorical dynamics during negotiations is as follows: The existence of international negotiations, which amplifies the effects of a two-level game, would require political leaders to use message gaps, whereas an absence of international negotiations would correspond to message consistency, as leaders have less of a need to cater to disparate demands.

To examine how these factors relate to message dynamics (i.e., consistencies vs. gaps) in negotiations toward conflict resolution, we designed a case-oriented study that takes an historical perspective offering combinations of these factors. The Israeli-Arab/Israeli-Palestinian conflict suggests a useful case for studying questions related to message targeting, as the core issues of the conflict present far-reaching meanings for Israel's international status, as well as meanings on a domestic level, including basic concepts of identity (Hammack, 2006). As certain definitions of the Israeli collective self are not accepted within the international community (Barnett, 1999), a necessary tension between domestic and foreign targeted political messages emerges. Within the context of negotiations, Israeli leaders have an interest in designing messages for domestic audiences that connect the leader with a consensual position, linking the leader with the accepted ethos of conflict prevalent in Israel (Bar-Tal, Raviv, Raviv, & Dgani-Hirsh, 2009). Conversely, leaders have an interest in designing messages for foreign audiences that emphasize Israel's desire for peace, its flexibility regarding sensitive issues, and its belief that such issues can be solved through negotiations (Barak, 2005). Within this intensive and challenging environment, political leaders must design messages that allow them to meet various audience demands.

Our case study focuses on the Israeli official discourse with respect to the Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian conflict over three distinct historical periods: 1967-1973, 1993-2000, and 2009-2012.<sup>2</sup> These periods were chosen to include a wide array with respect to the two factors examined. First, this range is characterized by the transition from a predominantly monolithic, politically mobilized media to a multichannel media environment during the 1990s (Katz, 1997) and in parallel the penetration of the Internet, social media, niche news media, and global news networks, resulting in mediatization of Israeli

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<sup>2</sup> During the first period, the conflict was perceived primarily as a conflict between Israel and its neighboring Arab states rather than with the stateless Palestinian people, who were only beginning to achieve a national awareness as a people, distinct from pan-Arabism (Kimmerling & Migdal, 2003).

politics (Kampf & Liebes, 2013).<sup>3</sup> Thus, according to our first premise, we assume that increasing mediatization in Israel from 1967 to 2012 corresponds to increasing message consistency over time.

Second, relations between Israel and the Arab states and Israel and the Palestinians underwent significant changes over the years. While the first period, spanning 1967 to 1973, was characterized by a complete lack of negotiations between Israel and any representative in the Arab world, the second period, from 1993 to 2000, was characterized by intensive negotiations on basic issues of national identity (Barnett, 1999). This period also demonstrated two clear political approaches to peace negotiations: (a) left-wing governments that illustrate commitment to the process that their party initiated (the Rabin, Peres, and Barak governments); (b) a right-wing government that is committed to previous government decisions, but approaches the process with skepticism (the first Netanyahu government). The third period, from 2009 to 2012, was characterized by short-lived indirect negotiations that broke down soon after they began, coupled with the rise of nationalist politics within Israel (Ravid, 2011). Thus, we expect that during the first period (1967–73), political leaders would be more inclined to use message consistency, due to less of a need to play a two-level game; during the second period (1993–2000), the existence of intensive negotiations corresponds with message gaps due to the political leader's increasing need to play a two-level game; and the third period (2009–12) would be characterized by message consistency, as political leaders perceive less need to cater to audiences' disparate demands. Table 1 summarizes the expression of the factors in each of the periods.

**Table 1. Factors in Each Period.**

Period	Degrees of mediatization	Negotiations with other party to the conflict
1967–1973	Low	None
1993–2000	Intermediate High	High
2009–2012	High	Low

### Method

The method of this study is based on a combined quantitative and qualitative content analysis of political messages presented by official Israeli representatives. The corpus comprised a population of 644 messages taken from 412 public performances delivered by Israeli political leaders (primarily, but not exclusively, prime ministers). A message was included in the corpus only if characterized by a political leader taking a stance on one of the core issues of the conflict or other related issues (see Table 2). Performances in public forums took place in the Knesset ( $N = 178$ ), the United Nations ( $N = 20$ ), foreign parliaments ( $N = 18$ ), academic and international conferences ( $N = 73$ ), press conferences ( $N = 78$ ), ceremonies ( $N = 17$ ), and in media interviews ( $N = 33$ ). Sources of data include the state archives, the

<sup>3</sup> Despite the existence of party-based newspapers, Israel's post-1967 media reality was monopolized by a single government-run television channel whose main news magazine attracted over 70% of the public on an average evening; this predominately monolithic media environment fragmented into a multichannel system in 1993 (Katz, 1997).

minutes from Knesset debates, the yearbook of official documents, and the websites of the prime minister's office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which were found through a manual search for messages in which leaders take a stance on one of the core issues of the conflict. Media interviews are from both Israeli and foreign media outlets, as follows: *Haaretz*, *Maariv*, *Davar*, *Ha'Olam HaZe*, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, *Newsweek*, and *Foreign Affairs*, which were found in the National Archives and journalism section of the Israeli National Library through a manual search, according to the same criteria.

We analyzed a total of 644 messages: 59% ( $N = 380$ ) of the messages were delivered in domestic setting and 41% ( $N = 264$ ) of the messages were delivered in foreign setting. We then divided the data into three periods: 30% ( $N = 197$ ) from the period 1967–73, 38% ( $N = 246$ ) from the period 1993–2000, and 31% ( $N = 201$ ) from the period 2009–12. We defined a message (unit of analysis) as at least one sentence from a speech, press conference, or quotation in the media in which the speaker takes a stance on one of the core issues of the conflict: (1) the future borders between Israel and its neighboring states, (2) security arrangements, (3) the right of return of the Palestinian refugees, (4) the fate of the Israeli settlements, or (5) the status of Jerusalem. In addition, we examined the recognition of legitimacy of Palestinians national existence and the acceptance of Palestinian statehood, both of which relate to the extent to which Israeli officials recognize the legitimacy of Palestinian national claims.

The first coding step involved dividing messages by geographical location: messages delivered within Israel were coded as (1) domestic, and messages delivered outside of Israel were coded as (2) foreign. Messages were then coded according to their reference to a specific core issue of the conflict. Finally, to gauge the existence of message gaps, we coded one of three stances that the speaker takes on the issue: dovish (coded 1), equivocal (coded 2), or hawkish (coded 3).

The category of equivocal messages is essential, as even when using message gaps, officials develop various strategies to reduce these gaps to avoid presenting a message perceived to be inconsistent with a previous message (Friedman & Kampf, 2014). The presentation of an equivocal message in one geographical setting and a direct message (dovish or hawkish) in the other was considered to be a message gap, even if the gap was not as wide as between direct dovish and hawkish messages.<sup>4</sup> Messages that presented a similar stance on an issue were considered consistent messages. An intercoders reliability test was conducted on 16% (105) of the coding units by an MA student in the social sciences, in which she coded messages as dovish, equivocal, or hawkish, using messages from all of the relevant periods. This resulted in a Krippendorff's alpha reliability of .86.

Table 2 presents guidelines for coding messages as either hawkish or dovish, according to each of the core issues, while equivocal messages present ambiguous stances that range between them.

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<sup>4</sup> At the linguistic-pragmatic level, equivocal messages are indirect and thus different than dovish or hawkish direct messages. Moreover, from the addressee's perspective, the potential to interpret equivocal messages as contradictory to dovish or hawkish direct message results in a message gap. See the example of an equivocal message concerning the Palestinian refugees in the section dedicated to the 1993–2000 period.

**Table 2. Message Coding—Dovish Versus Hawkish Messages.**

	Dovish	Hawkish
Borders	Future border will reflect the pre-1967 lines	Future border will not reflect pre-1967 lines
Security arrangements	Withdrawal will ensure security	Withdrawal will not ensure security
Palestinian refugees	The descendants of some Palestinian refugees can return to Israel	No descendants of Palestinian refugees may return to Israel
Settlements	Settlements will be evacuated	Settlements will not be evacuated
Jerusalem	Jerusalem will be divided into the capital cities of two states	Jerusalem will remain under exclusive Israeli sovereignty
Legitimacy of national existence	The Palestinians are a legitimate people	The Palestinians are not a legitimate people
Palestinian statehood	There will be a Palestinian state	There will not be a Palestinian state

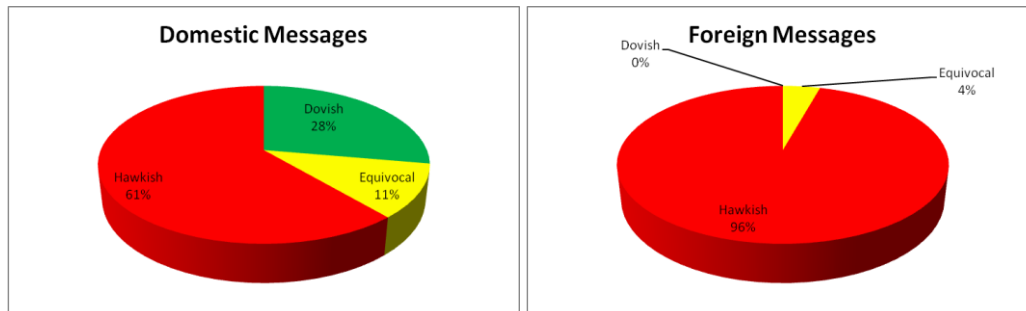
Following the coding and quantitative analysis of the messages, we conducted an interpretative content analysis of exemplary messages, which illustrates how each period's factors impact consistencies and gaps (see Table 1). This qualitative analysis involved identifying exemplary messages and comparing those delivered in domestic contexts to those delivered in foreign contexts that deal with the same issue. We examined their contents for indicators of consistencies and gaps, including similarities and differences in lexical choice and rhetorical argumentation, variant levels of directness and indirectness, and the use of equivocation strategies.

### **The Rhetorical Dynamics of Conflict Resolution Over Three Periods**

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative findings over three periods. Within each period, we present the quantitative content analysis followed by interpretive qualitative content analysis of exemplary messages.

#### **1967–1973: Political Considerations and Consistent Messages**

The first period is characterized by a highly nationalist, mobilized, preglobalized media, which we expect to correspond to message gaps, and foreign relations characterized by a lack of negotiations between Israel and the Arab leadership, which we expect to correspond to message consistency. Figure 1 clearly illustrates that there is only a slight inconsistency between messages that were delivered in a domestic setting when compared with messages delivered in a foreign setting. Descriptive statistics show that all messages (100%) in the domestic arena were hawkish, and 96% of the messages in the foreign arena were hawkish (the other 4% are equivocal). We employed a *t* test to assess the mean differences between domestic and foreign messages (higher average points represent more hawkish messages and vice versa). The evidence illustrates a high level of consistency between the two geographical settings. A comparison of the means reveals that there is a slight means difference (.043) between domestic messages ( $M = 3$ ) to the foreign messages ( $M = 2.95$ ) ( $t(195) = 2.40, p < .05$ ). We can conclude that this period is characterized by consistency between foreign and domestic messages.



**Figure 1. Message consistencies and gaps: 1967-73.**

As these findings indicate, the combination of a nationalist, mobilized media and the absence of international negotiation corresponds with a high level of consistency between messages delivered to foreign and domestic audiences.

The most frequently mentioned issue during the first period was borders, with 41 hawkish domestic messages and 28 hawkish foreign messages ("future border will not reflect pre-1967 lines"). The approach of Israeli leaders with respect to borders, following the 1967 war and UN Security Council Resolution 242, was to emphasize the wording of the resolution, particularly, the concept of "secure and recognized boundaries." Official speakers consistently avoid providing any details regarding what these boundaries are, but emphasize repeatedly what they are not: a return to the 1949 armistice lines. Messages presented in both domestic and foreign contexts on this issue are strikingly consistent.

The following statement was delivered by Prime Minister Eshkol, at a meeting with Israeli newspaper editors, on December 1, 1967: "We will not return to the ceasefire lines, we will uphold ceasefire agreements, until they will be exchanged with agreed upon and secure borders that are anchored in peace agreements." This message illustrates the position of upholding the ceasefire lines until secure borders can be agreed upon within the context of a peace agreement. The same position was found in a statement delivered by Golda Meir, the prime minister who followed Eshkol. In a speech delivered in the Israeli Knesset, Meir underpins the concept that secure and recognized boundaries cannot correspond to the 1949 armistice lines due to the omission of the word *the* from United Nations Security Council resolution 242, which implied that not all of the territories conquered would have to be returned:

The Resolution that *was* accepted said: "Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied" . . . not *all* territories or *the* territories . . . one of the principal provisions in the Resolution is the right to live in peace with secure and recognized boundaries. (Meir, 1970a)

Defining "secure and recognized boundaries" by what they are not is echoed in messages delivered by the same two prime ministers in foreign contexts. Prime Minister Eshkol made the following statement in an interview with *Newsweek* on February 4, 1969, in which he equates "secure and agreed lines" with a negation of the "situation preceding the June war," declaring the armistice lines "dead and buried":



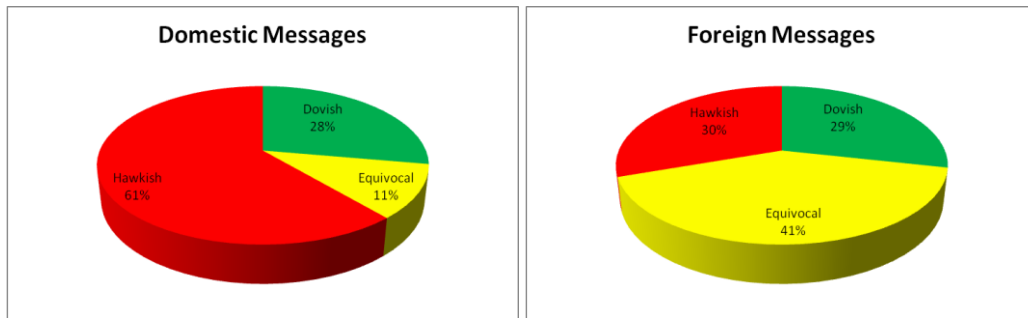
Let me say, clearly and unequivocally, there will be no return to the situation preceding the June war. The present ceasefire lines will not be changed except for secure and agreed lines within the framework of a final and durable peace. We must discuss new borders. New arrangements. The Armistice agreements are dead and buried. (Eshkol, 1969)

On June 4, 1970, Prime Minister Meir (1970b) echoed a similar stance to an international audience at the Socialist International conference: "After the President of Egypt had said that in its memorandum, we said, all right, now this is our position: secure and agreed borders. We don't accept the pre-5th of June lines."

In summary, our analysis indicates that during the post-1967 war period, political leaders used message consistency when speaking in different geographical settings. When examining the relevant factors in shaping messages, we arrive at the following conclusions: despite the monolithic and mobilized media framework, with less of a risk of overhearers, conditions that we would expect to facilitate the use of message gaps, the political leadership had no need to exploit this situation to resort to such gaps. The fact that the prevalent media environment did not impact message gaps as expected can be thus explained by the nature of relations with the other party to the conflict. The absence of negotiations regarding the future of the occupied territories corresponds with the absence of message gaps, as there was no need to satisfy the conflicting demands of a two-level game during the post-1967 geostrategic reality. Thus, our findings indicate that in this period the status of foreign relations has a more considerable impact than the media environment. Politicians did not use message gaps as there was no policy-based need to do so, even if the preglobalized media framework would allow for message inconsistencies. Furthermore, there was no evidence of attempts to create a cultural resonance by tailoring messages to foreign audiences.

### ***1993–2000: Political Considerations, Media Awareness, and Message Gaps***

The second period is characterized by the onset of a globalized media environment and a fragmentation of national media in Israel, which we expect to correspond to message consistency, and foreign relations characterized by intensive peace negotiations, which we expect to correspond to message gaps. The descriptive statistics presented in Figure 2 clearly point to inconsistencies between foreign and domestic messages: 61% of the messages in the domestic arena were hawkish, whereas in the foreign arena, 30% were hawkish; equivocal messages accounted for 11% in the domestic arena and 41% in the foreign arena; and dovish messages accounted for 28% in both domestic and foreign arenas. A comparison of the means reveals that there is a significant mean difference (.314) between the domestic messages ( $M = 2.33$ ) to the foreign messages ( $M = 2.01$ ) ( $t(243) = 2.94, p < .005$ ). Thus, we can conclude that this period is characterized by gaps between foreign and domestic messages.



**Figure 2. Message consistencies and gaps: 1993–2000.**

These findings indicate that the period characterized by the beginnings of a globalized media environment and intensive negotiations correspond with significant gaps between messages, further suggesting that the existence of negotiations toward conflict resolution has a greater impact than media factors on message design and targeting.

To refute the possibility that other political factors may explain the message gaps in this period, we have examined the relationship between governments’ political orientation and message design. The period 1993–2000 was characterized not only by intensive negotiations but also by two distinct political approaches toward the negotiations. Three of the governments during this period (the Rabin government, the short-lived Peres government, and the Barak government) had a left-wing orientation and were led by the Israel Labor Party, which initiated the Oslo peace process. Between the Peres and Barak governments, one right-wing government ruled (the first Netanyahu government), which grudgingly continued with the Oslo process due to inherited international commitments (Hirschfeld, 2014). To test the possibility that the use of message gaps during such conditions is only relevant for a specific type of government, we split this period into two time frames: left-wing governments (July 13, 1992–June 18, 1996; July 6, 1999–March 7, 2001) and a right-wing government (June 18, 1996–July 6, 1999). We then examined whether both time frames are characterized by significant message gaps. The descriptive statistics presented in Table 3 illustrate that both right-wing and left-wing governments display inconsistencies between foreign and domestic messages.

**Table 3. Left-Wing Versus Right-Wing Government Message Distribution.**

Government type	Message	Domestic messages	Foreign messages
Left-wing governments	Dovish	29	38
	Equivocal	11	45
	Hawkish	60	17
Right-wing government	Dovish	23	15
	Equivocal	10	35
	Hawkish	67	50

*Note.* Values are indicated as percentages. The differences between domestic messages and foreign messages are significant in both government types (right-wing governments: Pearson  $\chi^2 = 34.68, p < .001$ ; left-wing government: Pearson  $\chi^2 = 7.10, p < .050$ ).

In left-wing governments, 60% of domestic messages presented a hawkish stance, whereas only 17% were hawkish in the foreign arena. Equivocal messages accounted for 11% in the domestic arena and 45% in the foreign arena. Left-wing governments preferred dovish and equivocal messages abroad and hawkish messages at home. This extreme gap illustrates the extent to which left-wing governments were aware of the public diplomacy function of dovish and equivocal messages abroad, coupled with the need to present themselves as tough negotiators when facing a skeptical domestic audience.

The right-wing government also used significant message gaps, although less profoundly than the left-wing governments. For example, 67% of messages presented in the domestic arena were hawkish compared with 50% in the foreign arena. In the domestic arena, 23% of messages presented were dovish, whereas only 15% in the foreign arena were dovish. In the foreign arena, 35% of the messages were equivocal, whereas in the domestic arena, equivocal messages accounted for only 10%. These results illustrate that both left- and right-wing governments use significant message gaps in the given political and media conditions, illustrating that intensive negotiations is the factor that relates to the use of message gaps rather than a government's political orientation. We conclude that the importance of such negotiations, perhaps due to a sense of obligation to a political process, either initiated or inherited by the political leader, is greater than the political orientation of the government with respect to message gaps and consistencies.

A clear example of such a message gap can be found in the case of the Palestinian refugees. During the 1990s, Israeli political leaders presented disparate messages to domestic and foreign audiences on this issue. By using message-gap strategies, political leaders were able to present a hawkish position against the right of return domestically while presenting an equivocal stance abroad. The following message, presented in the Knesset by Foreign Minister Shimon Peres on September 23, 1993, is exemplary of the unequivocally hawkish domestic stance with respect to Palestinian refugees: "All of us understand, on the left and on the right, that the right of return implies a destruction of the demographic balance, we mean that the Jewish state as, essentially, a state with a Jewish majority." Presented as a shared belief that unites both sides of Israel's political spectrum, Peres positions this core issue as a political taboo whose implementation would bring about the destruction of Israel as a Jewish state.

When speaking in a foreign context, however, Peres presents a much more flexible position, by using the euphemistic terminology "union of families" or "family reunification," which frames the issue within a humanitarian discourse. This reframing of the right of return by using synonymous terminology is advanced by referring to past policy to enable future flexibility, in the following statement delivered on August 31, 1994, at an international press conference:

Over the years, there was a special consideration for the union of families. Over 100,000 refugees were permitted to come back, when the affinity is very close and immediate. About the rest, we shall have to sit down and see how to help each of those refugees to find a solution, without destroying the democratic fabric of the countries. (Peres, 1994)

Although dividing the refugees into two groups—with and without relatives—Peres advocates a problem-solving orientation by stating that a solution will be found for "each of those refugees" without close

families in Israel. Thus, Peres is able to present different messages to distinct audiences to cater to different demands of each audience, without explicitly contradicting himself.

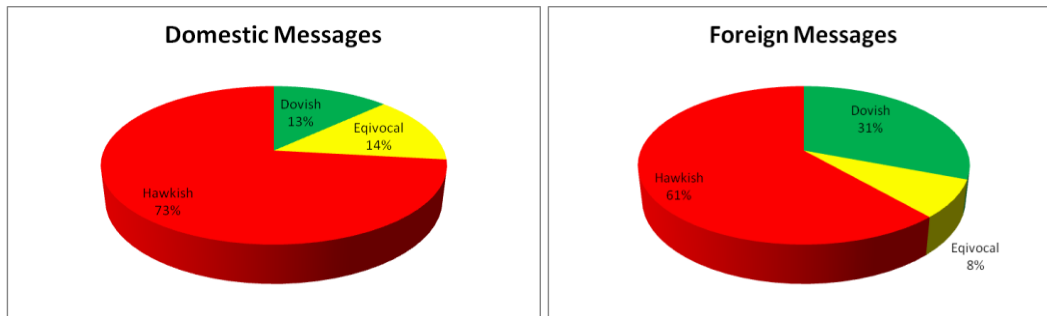
In summary, we found, as with the period of 1967–73, that foreign relations defined by intensive negotiations have a more considerable impact than media factors on a message's design. In addition, we found that the political orientation of a government is not a significant factor affecting the use of message gaps and consistencies. Even in an emerging globalized media environment, and notwithstanding the government's political orientation, political leaders resort to using message gaps due to the demands of foreign relations—intensive negotiations resulting in political leaders playing an amplified two-level game. Moreover, our findings indicate that during such negotiations politicians are more apt to use tools of public diplomacy to tailor messages to foreign audiences. Politicians illustrate an awareness of the risks of broad message gaps in a globalized media environment by applying strategies for blurring message gaps, which allow them to maintain a consistent and thus credible image when playing in either of the "game boards."

### **2009–2012: Political and Media Considerations and Message Consistencies**

The third period is characterized by a highly mediatized environment, which we expect to correspond to message consistency, and foreign relations characterized by minimal official Israeli–Palestinian negotiations, other than a very brief, and ultimately failed, period of "indirect negotiations," which we expect to correspond to message consistency.

The results presented in Figure 3 clearly illustrates that *both* domestic (73%) and foreign (61%) messages were definitively hawkish. Inconsistencies were found regarding dovish messages (13% in the domestic arena vs. 32% in the foreign arena) and equivocal messages (14% in domestic arena vs. 8% in the foreign arena). A comparison of the means reveals that there is a significant difference (.28) between the domestic messages ( $M = 2.63$ ) and foreign messages ( $M = 2.35$ ) ( $t(200) = 2.69, p < .05$ ). These results indicate that the message gap is relevant for dovish and equivocal messages. Nevertheless, the general trend is one of hawkish messages and consistency in both geographical settings. Corroboration of this claim can be found in the declaration made by the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, who consciously favored message consistency over gaps. After taking office, Lieberman suggested that Israel formulate a new foreign policy based on the premise of presenting a "clear, determined message" to foreign audiences that reflects Israel's actual goals rather than presenting incoherent messages abroad to appease foreign demands (Makovar-Belikov, 2010).

These findings indicate that the combination of a highly globalized media environment and minimal international negotiations corresponds with an overall result of message gaps with an emphasis on consistently hawkish messages.



**Figure 3. Message consistencies and gaps: 2009–12.**

The general strategy used to facilitate hawkish message consistency is the presentation of a number of paradigmatic principles for peace, which fall short of Palestinian “red lines.” One example deals with the status of Jerusalem, for which Prime Minister Netanyahu presents a consistent hawkish message across geographical settings. Despite the expectation that Israel agree to establishing a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem, Netanyahu counters this expectation by presenting Israeli sovereignty as a necessary condition for religious freedom. In the June 14, 2009, Bar-Ilan speech, Netanyahu stated, “Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, must remain undivided with continued religious freedom for all faiths.” He emphasizes the connection between religious freedom and Israeli sovereignty when speaking to foreign audiences as well, in the following speech on May 24, 2011, delivered to the U.S. Congress:

As for Jerusalem, only a democratic Israel has protected freedom of worship for all faiths in the city. Throughout the millennial history of the Jewish capital, the only time that Jews, Christians and Muslims could worship freely and have unfettered access to their holy sites has been during Israel’s sovereignty over Jerusalem. Jerusalem must never again be divided. Jerusalem must remain the united capital of Israel. (Netanyahu, 2011)

This example illustrates hawkish message consistency between foreign and domestic messages on the issue of Jerusalem, while the emphasis on freedom for all religions for which Jerusalem is holy is intended to foster cultural proximity abroad.

In summary, although the third period was characterized by message gaps due to the different distribution between dovish and equivocal messages in each setting, in general, politicians consistently used hawkish messages in both settings. When examining the impacting factors, we arrive at the following nuanced conclusions: First, this period illustrates the leadership’s possible awareness of the risks of significant message gaps within a globalized media environment, as expected. Second, the lack of meaningful negotiations corresponded with hawkish message consistency between the two settings, as there was little need to satisfy the conflicting demands of a two-level game. However, the gaps between dovish and equivocal messages between the two settings can be understood through the speaker’s awareness of contradictory audience demands within the context of international pressures to engage in negotiations and the existence of short-lived negotiations.

## Discussion

The analysis of three distinct periods has confirmed our premise that foreign relations characterized by intense negotiations, rather than mediatization processes, are a more plausible explanation for political leaders' use of message gaps. The examination of message gaps in different media environments over time has illustrated that the second period (1993–2000), characterized by growing mediatization of Israeli politics, points to the most considerable gap. Although we assumed that the preglobal, mobilized media during the period 1967–73 would be an ideal setting for gaps, its messages were found to be highly consistent. This indicates that a preglobal media environment is not a sufficient condition for employing message gaps; the lack of negotiations trumped media considerations, resulting in message consistencies.

While the differences in the media environments between the periods 1993–2000 and 2009–12 should not be diminished, both media environments are globalized and information intensive, meaning that in both periods political leaders would have to expect overhearers to exist for a message delivered in any public context. As such, even when using message gaps during the period of 1993–2000, political leaders adapt to media logic by using equivocation strategies that cater to different audience expectations while ensuring to avoid explicitly contradicting themselves. Thus, lack of awareness of a globalized media environment cannot be considered to be an exclusive factor in favor of the employment of message gaps during this period.

The third period illustrated a more nuanced picture. The significant gap between domestic and foreign messages may illustrate an alleged lack of importance that the speaker attributes to a highly mediatized environment. However, this period is characterized by consistently hawkish messages both at home and abroad—a finding that confirms our expectation of consistency. Nonetheless, when we consider the needs of public diplomacy within a globalized media environment, consistent hawkish messages that emphasize domestic constraints over international considerations illustrate a disdain of the requirements of mediatization and public diplomacy. The bottom line of this period's nuanced results demonstrates that the lack of intensive negotiations, rather than media factors, serve as a more probable explanatory framework for consistently hawkish messages. This finding mitigates the claim that various processes of mediatization "colonize" politics. The rhetorical dynamics of message gaps and consistencies cannot be explained solely by making reference to mediatization theory.

The two periods that lacked intense negotiations (1967–73 and 2009–12) exempted leaders from pressures of a two-level game, preventing the need to take the political risk of using gaps. Under such conditions, message consistency entailed a minimal risk, as international audiences do not develop expectations of the political leader to budge from domestic consensual positions. During periods of minimal or no engagement with the other party to the conflict, a political actor can easily present consistently hawkish messages that ultimately reject the demands of the other. As the first period was characterized by a complete absence of negotiations, its results are the most clear-cut: almost complete message consistency. The third period is more nuanced: The short-lived and ultimately failed "indirect negotiations" can explain the overall picture of statistically significant message gaps. Apparently, international pressures to engage in negotiations and the fleeting negotiations themselves resulted in

politicians targeting different messages to disparate audiences. However, the complete lack of progress in these negotiations can clearly be connected to the presentation of consistently hawkish messages. Although this study cannot claim causality between a lack of negotiations and consistently hawkish messages, we do find a link between them. We postulate that this link operates in both directions: Consistently hawkish messages diminish trust between the conflicted parties, limiting the potential for engaged negotiations, while a lack of engagement between the sides increases the potential for consistently hawkish messages.

Conversely, the period of 1993–2000, defined by intense negotiations and a divided domestic setting surrounding issues of national identity, corresponds to the use of message gaps. Thus, we can point to foreign relations defined by the existence of negotiations as the significant factor that coaxes political leaders to use message gaps. As the issues negotiated touched on the essence of national identity, leaders took the calculated risk of presenting disparate messages to different audiences. Such negotiations amplify the need to play a two-level game through message gaps.

As the second period is characterized by both right-wing and left-wing governments, we examined whether government orientation affected the use of message gaps. While governments of both political orientations tended to use message gaps, left-wing governments' more extreme use of message gaps illustrates their amplified awareness of each audience's disparate expectations and the need to portray a specific image to each audience. The use of dovish and equivocal messages in foreign settings advances public diplomacy by marketing the benefits of a transformative, historical process. The use of hawkish messages in domestic contexts serves to present the speaker as a tough negotiator who protects national interests. Although the right-wing government during this period also used significant message gaps, they were less monumental. The extensive use of hawkish messages both at home and abroad (even if more pronounced at home) may illustrate an overarching skepticism regarding the potential of negotiations. However, the widespread use of equivocal messages abroad as opposed to at home opens up a significant message gap, illustrating the desire of the right-wing government to externally project its commitment to previously signed agreements, even if it does not fully endorse them. With this in mind, the right-wing government's lack of dovish messages in foreign settings attests to the need to project an image of being a tough negotiator abroad.

When comparing the distribution of messages between two different periods, both characterized by right-wing governments (1996–99 and 2009–12), the first of which grudgingly advanced the peace process, successfully signing interim agreements (the Hebron Protocol of 1997 and the Wye River Memorandum of 1998), and the second which took part in the short-lived and ultimately failed "indirect negotiations," we find that the first period is characterized by more significant message gaps. These gaps may indicate that when a hawkish government inherits a process and continues it by signing additional interim agreements (as with the first right-wing government), it is subject to the pressures of a two-level game, even if it is skeptical of the inherited process. This finding also supports our claim that the existence of negotiations is the most plausible factor that coaxes political leaders to use message gaps. In summary, whatever the motivation of a politician to engage in a negotiated peace process—be it a desire to advance national security, improve economic opportunities, or embolden international standing—such a decision involves the risk of presenting concessions likely to be unpopular with domestic pressure groups.

Thus, the political leader creates message gaps to avoid appearing too conciliatory in a domestic setting while attempting to present hopeful, transformative messages abroad.

Returning to Kissinger's concept of constructive ambiguity, we now consider the pros and cons of using message-gap strategies in the course of conflict transformation; in other words, we examine the potential impact of the rhetorical dynamics of messages design and targeting on conflict resolution processes. Equivocal messages have been shown to be more likely than direct messages to elicit audience agreement and advance the speaker's positive image (Bavelas et al., 1990). Nevertheless, when attempting to advance transformative processes, the use of equivocation strategies can also create significant problems. Ambiguous statements may appease publics with conflicting attitudes but also can serve to generate controversy, as each side interprets such statements according to its needs, resulting in stumbling blocks when attempting to advance toward conflict resolution (Kampf, 2012). The use of ambiguity in negotiations allows politicians to advance consensual solidarity at home while fulfilling rhetorical expectations abroad. At the onset of conflict transformation processes, ambiguity is indeed a constructive tool required to connect with skeptical publics. "Avoidance strategies' can be utilized as an 'antidote to conflict situations'" (Leech, 1983, p. 113), allowing audiences demand to be "hedged" or "played down" while providing a greater degree of maneuverability in negotiations. Such hedging allows political actors to raise public awareness regarding required concessions through a gradual process, enabling the internalization of the deep revision of consensual beliefs required for the transformative process (Löwenheim, 2009). Indeed, when attempting to create a new public awareness, as the Israeli leadership did during the Oslo process, ambiguity was essential to facilitate a two-level game, particularly to enable domestic support for a highly controversial process. Without such ambiguity, political leaders would find themselves playing exclusively at either the domestic or the foreign game board, having lost either their domestic public or their foreign audiences.<sup>5</sup>

While this approach may be constructive by allowing a process to advance despite the lack of agreement between the sides, it prevents audiences from confronting choices crucial for knowledge-based participation and becomes problematic when contradicting interpretations of texts become apparent. The desire to remain ambiguous thwarts the possibility of a transformative process because it inculcates different perceptions among the negotiating parties regarding the nature of a final status agreement. Throughout the Oslo process, leaders' apprehension to directly tackle controversial issues created a situation in which the most sensitive issues had become taboo for the two leaderships—but not for their rivals' (Barak, 2005). At critical junctures during the internalization of concessions, equivocation must give way to direct messages which revise consensual beliefs; otherwise, various publics develop different and even contradictory approaches with respect to a final-status agreement.

In sum, message gaps, ultimately, serve the wants of politicians and their desire to maintain power without addressing the need to involve publics in the transformative process. Politicians find themselves unable to significantly advance conflict transformation; they are stuck in a partial reevaluation

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<sup>5</sup> As Hirschfeld (2014) argues in his book detailing the Oslo process for which he served as coarchitect, ambiguous wording was required at numerous stages to enable each side to present a text that could be interpreted by its public in a way that satisfied domestic demands.



due to conflicting audience demands, as they refuse to relinquish consensual messages in domestic settings, resulting in message gaps. However, the process of negotiating with different audience expectations through a nuanced discourse can hold water for only so long; in the end, a revised, unequivocal discourse must be presented to facilitate a structural transformative process.

Despite the fact that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has unique features, we believe this approach could be tested on other international conflicts. For example, President Putin’s domestic messages justified the conquest of Crimea via a strategic plan of nuclear deterrence, while his foreign messages emphasized the need to intervene only to protect ethnic Russians residing in Crimea, illustrating a significant message gap (Lough, 2015). In a second example, the nuclear agreement concluded between Iran and the P5+1 powers in July 2015 has been accompanied by significant gaps between the Iranian leadership’s foreign and domestic-targeted messages. While foreign-targeted messages have been constructed within the framework of a “charm offensive” (Kampf, 2016) and aimed toward rapprochement, domestic-targeted messages delivered by the Supreme Leader hailed and encouraged “death to U.S.” audience chants while labeling the United States “arrogant” (Nouri & Dehghanpisheh, 2015). Although these cases require further study, a cursory review of the political leadership’s messages in each conflict indicates the existence of message gaps within the context of other international processes.

Future research could analyze the phenomenon of rhetorical dynamics of political negotiation through the examination of additional factors that could impact message gaps, such as the roles of international mediation, international and domestic pressures, and cultural and political proximity between actors (Sheafer, Bloom, Shenhav, & Segev, 2013; Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009). For example, further research could examine the impact of an active mediator in conflict resolution negotiations on this rhetorical dynamic. At various stages of Israeli–Palestinian negotiations, international mediation was at times almost completely absent (e.g., the original Oslo process, 1993–95) while at other times was significantly engaged (e.g., the initiative of Secretary of State Kerry, 2013–14). Such a case could be used to understand how message targeting is impacted by a politician’s awareness of the involvement of mediators. In addition, the nature of power relations between the actors in the conflict and with the international mediator could have an impact on the need to appease international actors through the use of message gaps. Furthermore, future research could examine the extent to which cultural and political proximity between states can explain the use of message gaps. According to Sheafer and Shenhav (2009), cultural proximity represents values shared by different states. Defined as deeply rooted orientations guiding certain attitudes, norms, and opinions that direct human action, values form the broadest and most fundamental context for social interactions (see also Balmas & Sheafer, 2013). Conversely, political proximity purports alliances on the basis of congruence of states’ strategic interests (Sheafer & Shenhav, 2009; Sheafer, Shenhav, Takens, & van Atteveldt, 2014). Future study could test whether common values and political proximity between a pair of nations can be linked to less significant message gaps between domestic and foreign messages. For example, based on the World Values Survey (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010), the value proximity between Israel and the U.S. is greater than between Israel and Sweden; thus, one could expect that gaps between messages presented by Israeli officials in Sweden versus those presented in Israel would be more significant than those presented in the U.S. versus in Israel. Such studies will further advance our understanding of the cultural and political reasons

behind the design of messages in the global arena and how such targeting strategies impacts conflict transformation processes.

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