

Mediated public diplomacy and peace journalism: International public news agencies on the Syrian crisis

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Abstract

As the liberal international order has been falling, the heteropolar order coupled with politics of uncertainty has been rising. In this context, illiberal regimes of status-seeking powers have realized the value of public diplomacy to promulgate their versions of the “reality.” Those illiberal regimes’ adoption of public diplomacy tools (incl. international public news agencies) has generated discussions on theoretical and practical approaches to the field at the intersection of political science/international relations, media, and communication studies. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to contribute to the emerging literature on public diplomacy of non-Western illiberal democracies. With the assumption that those regimes’ illiberal democratic characteristics will be reflected in their public agencies’ coverage styles (e.g., monologic, conflictive, and unbalanced), the article raises the following question: How do illiberal democracies utilize international public agencies as public diplomacy channels? To answer this question, it compares framing strategies (peace/war journalism) of the Russian TASS and the Turkish Anatolian Agency public agencies during the Syrian crisis. The findings reveal that those illiberal regimes’ public agencies have reported the crisis as a

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state-centric monolog in conflict with the West by disrupting the global public good (i.e., peace).

Keywords

public diplomacy, media, public news agencies, Russia, Turkey, Syrian crisis

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Introduction

The liberal international order (LIO) has been challenged by both Western populists and illiberal non-Western states struggling for recognition (Adler-Nissen and Zarakol, 2021). This heralds “a time of intensified uncertainty” in which various actors have been adopting the arsenal of public diplomacy (incl. digital media) to promote their political regimes and versions of the “reality” in this heteropolar landscape (Surowiec and Manor, 2021). Those status-seeking non-Western regional powers with illiberal democratic regimes—for our purposes Russia and Turkey—have generated discussions on the theoretical and practical perspectives of public diplomacy as a growing field (Çevik, 2018: 9). This paper aims to compare the “mediated public diplomacy,” which briefly means an organized attempt to control the framing of the state’s policy to the foreign audience (Entman, 2008; Sheaffer and Gabay, 2009) of two status-seeking illiberal states, namely Russia and Turkey, during the Syrian Crisis.

The Arab uprisings (earlier labeled as Arab Spring) were a series of anti-governmental protests against autocratic regimes of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in the early 2010s. Started in Tunisia first and then quickly spread to Libya and Egypt. On the Syrian front, commencing as peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations against President Bashar al-Assad in 2011, as the unrest spread nationwide and the crackdown of Assad forces intensified, it transformed into a full-scale civil war by 2012. On the one hand, Russia and Iran have been the die-hard supporters of the Assad regime, on the other hand, Turkey, Western powers (e.g., the US and the EU), and several Gulf monarchies (e.g., Saudi Arabia and Qatar) have backed opposition forces to varying degrees (Hinnebusch and Saouli, 2019). By taking sides and providing money, armament, and fighters to the Syrian crisis, those foreign powers’ involvement provided fertile ground for “violent non-state actors” (Oktav et al., 2018) of extremist jihadist groups (e.g., the Islamic State-ISIL) and the US supported Kurdish groups (e.g., PYD and YPG) to materialize their aspirations to become autonomous. Concerned about the conflict spillover effects of those violent non-state actors’ insurgencies to Turkish territory (Dal, 2016), the AK Party led the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) to launch Operation Euphrates Shield against the YPG/PYD and ISIL forces in northern Syria. This operation proceeded with Operation Olive Branch, and more recently by Operation Peace Spring. Arguably, the motives behind those military operations could not be fully grasped without the resurgence of populist politics through media in the post-July 15 coup attempt context of

Turkey (İşeri and Ersoy, 2021). When we look at the current situation of the Syrian Crisis, the Assad regime controls the biggest cities, but the remaining large parts of the country are held by Syrian rebels, Turkish-backed rebels, jihadists, and Kurdish groups. The north-western province of Idlib has remained the last opposition stranglehold, which has been dominated by a jihadist alliance, called Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). Accusing all parties of perpetrating “the most heinous violations,” the UN Syrian Commission of Inquiry Report (2021) stated that “military solutions” have led to a decade of death, denial, and destruction. As UN Special Envoy for Syria, Mr Geir O. Pedersen put it, “a military solution is an illusion” and there should be a political solution in the case that the will would be there (BBC, 2022).

Stressing on Russian and Turkish public agencies’ coverages on the Syrian crisis, this article’s contribution to the emerging multidisciplinary area of public diplomacy is three-fold: (1) Concurring with Sevin et al. (2019: 4822) that political science/international relations (IR) and communication studies approaches should be combined to increase the explanatory power and Cooper (2019) proposing to include domestic politics to public diplomacy studies in the framework of public scholarship, this study adopts multidisciplinary outlook by combining approaches (e.g., the domestic turn in foreign policy analysis/IR) (cf., Kaarbo 2015) and methods (e.g., framing analysis) (Ha, 2017) of different disciplines. (2) Adopting a comparative cross-sectional study to examine Russian and Turkish international public agencies’ framing strategies during the Syrian crisis, the article complements the emerging literature on “mediated public diplomacy” at a time of increased visibility of warfare/conflict thanks to international news networks and digitized media (Bayram, 2015; Melki and Jabado, 2016; Sheafer and Shevlan, 2009) with its empirical findings. (3) Utilization of peace/war journalism frames (Ciftcioglu and Shaw, 2021; Ersoy, 2016; Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005) along with the populist frame of anti-elitism (or anti-Westernism) (İşeri and Ersoy, 2021; Melek and Iseri, 2022) to decipher editorial strategies of status-seeking powers’ international public news agencies.

The TAFs military interventions on the Syrian border in different periods starting from 2015 until 2020. With the involvement of Russia in those interventions, the news agencies of both states (Anadolu Agency—AA and the Russian News Agency—TASS) published relevant news for the international public in English. It can be claimed that those circulated news of the agency published in English is a diplomatic window that opens to the outside for every country, but it can also be stated that those coverages aim to convince the international public that the military operations against Syria are justified.

Journalism culture in those illiberal democratic countries of Russia and Turkey has been shaped in line with their growing authoritarian-nationalist political-economic context. Indeed, various reports (FH, 2022; RSF, 2022) and academic literature on Russia (Kovalev, 2021; Nygren et al., 2018; Slavtcheva-Petkova, 2019; Yablokov and Schimpfössl, 2021) and Turkey (İşeri and Ersoy, 2021; Över, 2021; Yıldırım et al., 2021) have documented the nexus of authoritarian domestic context and journalistic practices (e.g., self-censorship, a decline of pluralism). In this light, those media/journalists critical of the government have been frequently assaulted/harassed/threatened/jailed both in Russia (RSF 12.09.2022) and Turkey (RSF 12.08.2022). For its purposes, this

article sheds light on the parallelism of those public news agencies with the agendas of their respective political elites and/or dominant parties in the illiberal political contexts of their respective countries (cf. Magdin, 2021; Melek and Iseri, 2022).

Two interrelated research questions on framing strategies of those status-seeking illiberal countries (i.e., Turkey and Russia) led public agencies (i.e., AA and TASS) during the Syrian operations are as follows:

R1. Did AA and TASS adopt a monologic or collaborative style in their coverage?

R2. How did AA and TASS news agencies adopt frames (war or peace) in their reporting about the Syrian crisis?

Conceptual framework: public diplomacy, media, and peace/war journalism

From traditional diplomacy to (new) public diplomacy

Traditionally aiming to influence decision-makers outside the country, diplomacy has diversified its target audience and included a multitude of domestic and foreign actors (e.g., network diplomacy) within its scope with the dynamic process of globalization. Today, shaping public opinion in foreign countries is considered the main new element of diplomacy. In this respect, there are even those opinions that today's diplomacy consists largely of public diplomacy (PD) (Cull, 2009). In this parallel, Manheim (1994: 4) defines public diplomacy as an "effort by the government of one nation to influence public or elite opinion in a second nation to turn the foreign policy of the target nation to advantage." Historically, PD has been adopted in the form of a government's communication with the people of another state. In this process, an immediate effect is not expected most of the time. Contact with the foreign public may be related to the image of the relevant international actor, or it may be in the form of supporting a certain idea that is important for its foreign policy. In any case, the intention is to shape the international environment in line with foreign policy interests by contacting foreign public opinion. Differently put, public diplomacy is a foreign policy tool or an instrument of policymakers to advance their perceived national interests (Sevin, 2017: 2). Recently, there has been a growing academic literature on a new type of public diplomacy, namely, the new public diplomacy (NPD). Although the NPD shows various similarities with the mentioned PD, it emphasizes various changes in actors and audience, and the implementation phase of diplomacy, their overall aim remains the same: "the management of the international environment through engagement with a foreign public" (Cull, 2009:12–13).

Media and (new) public diplomacy

Another feature of NPD, for our purposes, is the utilization of media (e.g., international news agencies). In the digital age, governments are well organized in their

communication tools to shape their state images by using mass media such as national news agencies. Nye (2004, 2008) has attempted to define this public diplomacy process mostly from a soft power perspective (see also Gilboa, 2000; Manheim, 1994; Sheaffer and Gabay, 2009). According to Golan (2013:1251) “while traditional diplomacy is focused on government-to-government engagement and the soft power approach is focused on government-to-citizen engagement, the mediated public diplomacy approach is focused on government-to-citizen engagement that is mediated by a third party—the global news media.” Thus, global news media such as news agencies, and news networks became a part of the mediated public diplomacy tool. In this way, states are directly approaching and building a second-level agenda (Cheng et al., 2016) on the citizens. Therefore, the English language news services are a more important instrument for governments to reach a mass audience.

Samuel-Azran (2013) divided the role of international broadcasting in public diplomacy into two periods: The first period dates to the First World War, which was also defined as propaganda activities by state-sponsored broadcasting. The second period began in the 1980s with privately owned global news networks such as CNN, and MSNBC. With the effect of globalization and privatization in broadcasting, governments began to lose their influence on news. At this point, state-sponsored news agencies stepped in and helped countries do public diplomacy and strengthen the country’s image (Cottle, 2008; Herkenrath and Knoll, 2011). As stated by Samuel-Azran (2013: 1294) “The station’s global and/or regional credibility gained during peacetime makes it a highly potent public diplomacy tool, which allows the state to influence public opinion and in turn impose pressure on elite groups in a foreign state to modify the target state’s policies to the state’s advantage.” For instance, during the Qatari–Saudi conflict Al-Jazeera news cooperation was used as a diplomatic tool in public diplomacy.

Entman’s (2008) and Leonard’s (2002) studies show the significant role of the media in shaping public opinion on foreign affairs. Especially during conflict times, media was used as a public diplomacy tool for instituting legitimacy (Bar-Tal, 2000) of the state’s position in the global arena. In this parallel, states have established news agencies with English language support to provide “news” to all over the world and have public diplomacy with that. Welbers et al. (2018) argued that in international events, the reach and influence of news agencies are much greater than local news organizations. In the case of state-owned news agencies such as TASS, Gehlbach and Sonin (2014) reported that the government’s political ideology drives what foreign events are covered and how they are reported.

Acknowledging international broadcasting (utilization of mass media outlets) as one of the five forms of PD (others incl. listening, cultural diplomacy, advocacy, and nation branding along with the parallel activity of psychological warfare), Cull (2009: 21) defines it as an actor’s effort to manage the international environment by mass media means to communicate with foreign publics. Even though there seems a relative consensus in the relevant literature on how the global media shape the conduct of foreign policy, there remains the question of whether the media are functioning as independent autonomous actors (i.e., CNN Effect) or sophisticated instruments of the states (Gilboa, 2000: 732). What is clear is that the speed at which news spread around the

globe has changed the conduct of diplomacy (Gilboa, 2000; Seib, 2012). While television and even radio remain the primary channels of communication in the world, social media and the internet [media] have made their mark (Rawnsley, 2016: 43). In this parallel, the media has turned out to be state's main channel of PD efforts (Entman, 2008; Leonard, 2002; Sheafer and Shenhav, 2009) with its power by telling the public not only "what to think about" (i.e., agenda-setting), but also "how to think about it" (i.e., framing) (McCombs, 2005: 546).

The media's role in PD brings us to two separate, but interrelated concepts of "media diplomacy" and "mediated public diplomacy. While the former denotes "uses of the media by leaders to express interest in negotiation, to build confidence, and to mobilize support for agreements" (Gilboa, 2002: 741), the latter means "efforts using mass communication (including the internet) to increase support of a country's specific foreign policies among audiences beyond that country's borders" (Entman, 2008: 88). For its purposes, the article relies on more targeted and short-termed "mediated public diplomacy" concept, whose objective is to improve the image of a communicator among the foreign audience, and ideally among foreign policymakers, thereby, galvanize support for its actions (e.g., military operation) (Sheafer and Shenhav, 2009: 275) through international news agencies. At this point, one should note that the adoption of peace journalistic frames would likely contribute to those agencies' principal objective of elevating their respective countries' international image.

Journalists set the public agenda both inside and outside the country. Studies conducted on this subject show that posts by politicians also affect the setting of the agenda on digital platforms, especially on Twitter. In the study by Güneşli et al. (2017) which tweets of Turkish political leaders were analyzed, it was revealed that politicians manipulated public diplomacy and agenda. Auwal et al. (2020) also found that the politicians set and manipulate the agenda by revealing the public diplomacy of the politicians in Nigeria over Twitter and its transfer to the newspaper agendas. While all this is happening on the political side, it has been revealed that journalists do not blend the agenda topics they receive through politicians with the criteria of peace journalism (Ersoy, 2016, 2010).

The relationship between public diplomacy and peace journalism

Many studies discussed public diplomacy as explaining how governments organize the political and ideological public opinion, they want to create on the citizens of another country on any subject by using communication tools. It is known that when governments use public diplomacy, they use mass media in general and journalists, as the fastest and easiest way to achieve their ideologies (national interests and interests) and the effect they want to create. In public diplomacy, the media has an important role in the concept that Golan (2013) defines as "the mediated public diplomacy". In this process, the media, especially the national agencies broadcasting in English, make news to reach large audiences and create well country's image. The concept of peace journalism comes first

among those who criticize this point. Although the concept of peace journalism sees itself as a critical approach, it emphasizes the importance of journalists taking more responsibility in the news process, defending the rights of the public rather than politicians, critically looking at events, and controlling the discourse and actions of politicians. Ersoy and Miller (2020: 324) explains peace journalism as follows: “It is a journalistic approach that protects and defends all kinds of rights with a sensitive language and news framework by revealing common values with the mediator and active role of the media in any problem and crisis period.” The first study that led to the emergence of the concept of peace journalism was the research of Galtung and Ruge (1965), which is also important in terms of news values. According to this research, the widely accepted news values among journalists were confrontational values highlighting negative elements. After that study, Galtung opened the concept of peace journalism to discussion and stated that such negative elements in news values are also reflected in the language of the news, revealing that journalists play a role that can lead to conflict in societies. Considering that the mainstream media has turned into a public diplomacy tool of governments in many countries, the understanding of peace journalism that is accurate, balanced, fair, and on the side of the public can support the ideal public diplomacy concept.

According to Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) peace journalism is a process of reporting on the news that creates opportunities for a non-violent response to conflicts. Besides, peace journalism tries to expose misinformation on both sides of the conflict, along with providing a voice to the people. This is essential for public diplomacy because while exposing misinformation on both sides’ journalists give us balanced and fair reports not only from politicians’ perspectives.

Peace journalism assumption supports framing events in a more comprehensive and accurate state of affairs than those forced by the elite (Shinar, 2007). Another importance is that this attempt prevents conflict beforehand and conflict does not necessarily transform into violence. The peace journalism model requires journalists to play an active role in the face of issues that concern society (Ersoy and Miller, 2020). From this point of view, there is a need for a new language that will protect public rights and interests, away from conflict culture, reconciliatory, humane, and using conflict resolution techniques¹, rather than being a tool of politicians in the internal and external public diplomacy process. Galtung (2003) stated that: “Peace journalism tries to depolarize by showing the black and white of all sides, and to deescalate by highlighting peace and conflict resolution as much as violence.” According to the understanding of peace journalists, in such conflict environments, journalists are asked to cover the conflict as a problem that needs to be solved in their news. However, some expressions legitimize conflict, normalize it and fill it with expressions of victory, usually in the language of mainstream media and global news agencies.

Ersoy (2017) defines peace journalism as “...the concept of “peace journalism” includes ethical values that would serve the interest of the media in many countries in which there are ongoing wars and peace processes” (p. 463). These ethical values are values that can be developed and practiced by many journalists. Ersoy and Tamar (2021) during the pandemic period conducted research on Covid-19 news, which

revealed that the ethical values of peace journalism can be used by journalists during such a pandemic period. Similar peace journalism strategies were studied by Auwal and Ersoy (2022), and it was stated that political discourses create social psychological barriers in societies. That is why the norms, strategies, and principles of peace journalism are gaining importance in the language of news and are guiding in finding solutions to problems with common values.

National news agencies are directly/indirectly used as the mediated public diplomacy tool (Golan, 2013) by governments. In other words, whether the principles of peace journalism are followed in the reporting process of state-led international news agencies (e.g., Turkish Anatolian News Agency (AA) and Russian TASS) would determine the prospects of materializing soft power projection, thereby, elevating the international image of their respective states.

Public diplomacy of illiberal democracies: Russia and Turkey

Against the backdrop of resurgent authoritarian populist politics (Kendall-Taylor et al., 2017), Cooper (2019: 43) calls for “the revised framework of public diplomacy needs to be directed towards domestic as well as towards foreign audiences.” At this point, the regime type (i.e., liberal and illiberal democracies) matters in the way PD is executed. Thanks to the engagement of their civil societies, liberal democracies are likely to adopt “dialogue” or “collaboration” paradigms in their PD activities. Conversely, “illiberal democracies” consider their PD as an “informative” or “identity-defining” platform for policymakers without the presence of vibrant civil society and domestic constraints. This prompts illiberal democracies to embrace the “monologue” paradigm as an outdated and ineffective form of PD at a time of globalized open networks (Pisarska, 2016: 95–198), rather than “collaborative” peace journalistic frames. Ersoy and Miller (2020) collaborative peace journalism as “peace journalists realize that participatory collaborative communication processes – inclusive of the general public – are essential for resolving and for creating a sphere in which shared values and interests can be established, for creating an equitable strategy for distributive justice, plus for resolving identity dichotomies” (p. 8).

From a realist strategic point of view, a state’s prioritization of its narrow interests in its interaction with others may seem reasonable. Referred to as “strategic PD” which is “nothing more than the practice of propaganda” (Manheim, 1994: 7), the audience could perceive that type of state-centric egoist conduct of PD as repulsive, namely “negative soft power” (Cull, 2009: 15), unless “sharp power” to distort political environments in democracies (Walker et al., 2020). At this point, Pisarska (2016: 2) proposes “collaborative,” rather than “monological/dialogical” PD that would enable a true engagement of domestic society and non-governmental stakeholders to cherish “a spirit of mutual partnership for common good.” In this parallel, the NPD intends to “...explain fully one’s policies and show how they contribute to the delivery of global public goods, such as peace, security, respect for human rights and international law...” (Proedrou and Frangonikolopoulos, 2012: 734). In the case that genuine collaborative PD has been adopted, those policies would not be solely the activity of a given state (Melissen,

2005: 8), but a variety of non-state actors collaborating (incl. NGOs) with foreign audiences to address common challenges. Differently put, those states cooperating and enhancing dialogue with their civil society will likely be more successful in their PD. This will be a tough challenge for those illiberal democracies—for our purposes Russia and Turkey—perceiving plurality as a threat to their national interests.

Among those “illiberal democracies,” Russia and Turkey are two rising powers in the “quest for increased status and prestige” (Dal, 2019: 500). Perceiving the *status-quo* as an obstacle to their status-seeking ambitions, they could contribute to “the destruction of [already declining liberal] international order” through gradually weakening its foundations (Ward, 2017: 6). Meanwhile, those two status-seeking powers “discovered the merits of public diplomacy” and engaged in utilizing its means on their terms (Çevik, 2018: 9) as we will examine with stress on “mediated public diplomacy” below.

Being outsiders and challengers to Europe historically, Russia and Turkey aspire to recover their status or privileged positions in the hierarchy of the modern world system enjoyed by their predecessors, the Russian and the Ottoman Empires. This prompts Russia and Turkey to define their national interest in relation to their struggle with the West, rather than their bi-lateral interactions (Balta, 2019: 71–72). Various global (e.g., American-led financial crisis in 2008) and regional (e.g., the double enlargements of NATO and the EU fixing them on the European periphery, the West’s non-credible stance in the Arab uprisings, particularly in Syria) developments paved the way for both Russia and Turkey to come closer as they feel excluded by the West. Russo-Turkish relations have intensified further following the July 15, 2016, coup attempt against President Erdogan-led Turkish government. From Ankara’s perspective, just like the Gezi Park Protests in 2013, Western capitals have not only neglected to express solidarity with the legitimate government in Turkey but also played an instrumental role in those anti-governmental uprisings. On the other hand, President Putin gave utmost support to President Erdoğan’s regime. In this parallel, Russia allowed Turkey to launch a military operation (Operation Euphrates) in northern Syria (Balta, 2019: 78–80). This Russian green light enabled Turkey to clear the area to the west of the Euphrates from not only the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh), but also the People’s Protection Units (YPG) or the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDC) composing YPG units fighting against the former. This development elevated threat perceptions of Western capitals and prompted them to be critical of Turkey’s Syrian operations (Buhari-Gulmez, 2020; Nas, 2019). In this light, a comparative analysis of Russia’s and Turkey’s mediated PD could enhance our understanding of how PD is conducted in non-democratic regimes during international conflicts.

Method

In this study, research data were collected and analyzed using the quantitative content analysis technique. Neuendorf (2002: 10) defined content analysis as: “...quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method (including attention to

objectivity-intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability, and hypothesis testing) ...". We have defined three general frame categories for this content analysis of the news stories. The first one is "Attacking Elite," the second one is "War & Peace Journalism Frames," and the last one is "Journalistic Practices." In the first category of the content analysis, we did the content analysis on the news stories to understand to what extent AA and TASS news stories are using "attacking elite (foreign country or grouping)" frames. Under the "War & Peace Journalism Frames" categories we have eight sub-categories such as (i) Self and Other – Other in the Self, (ii) Just war - Common ground, (iii) Blame the other side - Self-reflexive criticism, and (iv) Hate speech - Friendly discourse. In the last part of the content analysis, we examined the "Emphasis sources" (elite/official and people/civil society) and "attribution sources" (foreign and domestic) to understand journalism practices. The empirical aim of this study is to decide to what extent these frames are applied in the news and which sources and attributions are used more than others.

Data gathering and reliability

Three Syrian military operations (2015–2020) operated by the Turkish Army are the subject of this study (Euphrates Shield, Peace Spring, Olive Branch Operation, see Table 1). The news stories from AA² and TASS³ were derived from their official websites search, with those not directly related to our cases excluded.

A search was made on the official news sites of AA and TASS with Google Advanced Search. During the search, 3 operation names were used as keywords: Euphrates Shield Operation (24 August 2016–29 March 2017), Peace Spring Operation (20 January–24 March 2018), and Olive Branch Operation (9–17 October 2019). All the news between the start and end of each operation was included in the research.

Three coders processed $N = 314$ news stories (see Table 2) in total written at the time of three operations: Euphrates Shield Peace Spring ($N = 86$), Peace Spring Operation ($N = 183$), and Olive Branch Operation ($N = 45$). According to Miles and Huberman (1994)

Table 1. Turkey's three Major cross-border operations in Syria.

Name	Dates	Official and stated objectives
Operation Euphrates Shield (<i>Fırat Kalkanı</i>)	August 24, 2016–March 29, 2017	Remove/eliminate ISIL from occupied Jarabulus and al-Rai
Operation Olive Branch (<i>Zeytin Dalı</i>)	20 January–24 March 2018	Create a safe zone in Afrin by dislodging, if not eliminating, the YPG.
Operation Peace Spring (<i>Barış Pınarı</i>)	October 9, 2019– October 17, 2019	Prevent the creation of a "terror corridor" (i.e., the YPG) across the country's southern border.

Adopted from İşeri & Ersoy (2021: 2878).

Table 2. Total number of news stories from three different military operations.

	<i>Euphrates Shield Operation</i>	<i>Peace Spring Operation</i>	<i>Olive Branch Operation</i>	Total
AA	46	147	27	220
TASS	40	36	18	94
Total	86	183	45	314

for the reliability of the research coding, at least 70% agreement should be reached among the coders. Three coders' intercoder reliability test result is 80%. We also used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistic program to get our results.

Ersoy (2016) developed a table that summarized the peace and war journalism frames in the news stories. Table 3 gives us a perspective to understand how media play a critical role during war and conflict situations.

Findings and discussions

Turkey's military operations toward Syria (see Table 1) have provided fertile ground for examining how military operations have shaped the public diplomacy of news agencies in the international arena. Those two status-seeking powers with illiberal democratic regimes, Russia and Turkey, have been united in their anti-Westernism as noted above. This phenomenon became salient during Turkey's military operations towards northern Syria under the auspices of Russia. In this context, their mediated public diplomacy agencies Turkish AA ($n = 605$) and to a lesser extent Russian TASS ($n = 261$) have widely ($n = 866$ in total) utilized anti-Western frames. In most of its anti-Western coverages, the AA utilized anti-Europe/EU ($n = 197$), anti-the US ($n = 192$), and anti-NATO ($n = 216$) for their alleged material/moral support to its nemesis PKK/YPG/PYD units. On the other hand, TASS adopted anti-Europe/EU ($n = 197$), anti-the US ($n = 192$), and anti-NATO ($n = 216$) mainly to voice Russia's criticism of the Western support for those opposition forces against the "legitimate" Bashar Assad-led Syrian regime. Table 2 above shows the total number of stories and frequencies across the three different military operations (i.e., $n = 220$ from AA and $n = 94$ from TASS). Moreover, the results across Tables 4 to 9 show the replication of various frames utilized in the news stories by Turkish AA and Russian TASS.

These findings have verified our R1 (Their coverage was monologic, rather than collaborative with western powers) expecting to observe monologic coverages without engaging in relation-building with the Western counties as stakeholders in the Syrian crisis. As noted above, both the AA and the TASS, which are the public agencies of status-seeking Russia and Turkey in defiance of the international order, report the Syrian crisis with frequent anti-elitist/anti-Western frame utilizations.

From the point of view of public diplomacy, we can say that the national news agencies have adopted the four sections of war journalism: (i) Self and other, (ii) Just war, (iii) Blame the other side, and (iv) Hate speech.

(i) Other in the Self - Self and Other Frames

Table 3. Peace/war journalism and populist (attacking elite/Anti-Westernism) frames, explanations, and examples.

Frame & Explanation	Example
War Journalism	
NEGATIVE (towards the other)	
1. <i>Self and Other</i>	
Making self and other distinction	“They vandalized 135 mosques in southeastern provinces, including Sirnak’s city center and Idil and Silopi districts, Diyarbakir’s Sur district, and Mardin’s Nusaybin district.” (AA, 25.01.2018, PYD/PKK terrorist group vandalizes places of worship)
2. <i>Just war</i>	
Emphasizing only war-related with the opposition side	“The Turkish-led Operation Euphrates Shield began in late August to improve security, support coalition forces, and eliminate the terror threat along the Turkish border using Free Syrian Army fighters backed by Turkish artillery and jets.” (AA, 27.02.2017, Train carrying 22 armored personnel carriers and troops reaches border region of southeastern Turkey)
3. <i>Blame the other side</i>	
Criticizing the ‘Other’ side’s government policies	“Terrorist organizations are just the faces and puppets in this struggle. We are in a struggle against the forces behind these organizations,” he said.” (AA, 31.12.2016, Erdogan: ‘Turkey will definitely reach its 2023 goals’)
4. <i>Hate speech</i>	
Providing hate speech and insulting statements to the opposite side	“The false reports by “baby killer” PKK/PYD-YPG terrorists claiming that Turkish Armed Forces targeted civilians in Qamishli and Derik in northern Syria “push the limits of reason”, said the ministry in a statement.” (AA, 11.10.2019, Turkey rejects claims of targeting civilians in N. Syria)
Peace Journalism	
POSITIVE (towards the other)	
1. <i>Other in the Self</i>	
Try to seek the other in the self	“In a Sunday statement, the KRG described the attack as “an assault on the Kurdish people” and called on the PYD to halt such assaults.” (AA, 05.12.2016, KRG decries PYD attack on Kurdish protesters in Syria)
2. <i>Common ground</i>	
Seek common ground instead of conflict	“They focused on efforts to monitor the ceasefire and the prospects for the intra-Syrian consultations in Geneva due to be held at the end of this month.” (TASS, 16.02.2017, Meetings involving Syrian armed opposition held in Astana)
3. <i>Self-reflexive criticism</i>	
Criticizing own government policies	Null
4. <i>Friendly discourse</i>	
Providing constructive statements to the opposite side	“So we are a small voice, but with Russia, this has been a very good 12 months of cooperation, and we are looking forward to discussing how do we move forward aggressively in a positive way for the next 12 months.”

(continued)

Table 3. Continued

Frame & Explanation	Example
Populist Frame <i>1. Attacking Elite (Anti-Westernism)</i>	<p>(TASS, 13.02.2018, King of Jordan: Our relations with Russia are based on mutual trust)</p> <p>“During Thursday’s news conference, Cavusoglu said one of the reasons behind why Turkey’s trust in the U.S. was lacking had to do with the arms provided to YPG/PKK [terrorists].” (AA, 25.01.2018, Turkey, Austria look to normalize relations)</p>

Adapted from Ersoy (2016); İşeri and Ersoy (2021).

Table 5 shows us the “Self and other” frames usage of the news agencies (AA & TASS). According to Table 3 results, AA used $n = 198$ self and other frames in three military operations. TASS has $n = 33$ self and other frames. Most of the self and other frames have been used in *Peace Spring Operation* news stories ($n = 159$). Among the 314 news stories, $n = 80$ of them do not include any self and other frames. It can be argued that both news agencies tend to use self and other distinctions instead of seeking the other in the self.

(ii) Common Ground - Just War Frames

Table 4 results indicate that $n = 198$ Just war frames were used by both news agencies. $n = 89$ news stories did not include any just war frame. Common ground detected in $n = 20$ news stories. Among the military operations, *Peace Spring Operation* has the highest number ($n = 148$) of just war frame usage in AA and TASS, *Euphrates Shield Operation* ($n = 35$), and *Olive Branch Operation* ($n = 15$) are followed. Table 4 results show that both news agencies emphasize only war-related with the opposition side in military operations.

(iii) Self Reflexive - Blame the Other Side Frames

Table 7 results state that news agencies used $n = 183$ *Blame the Other Side Frames* in three military operations news stories. Again, *Peace Spring Operation* has the highest frequency in this frame ($n = 157$). AA preferred to use $n = 135$ and TASS used $n = 22$ to blame the other side frames. In another word, both news agencies were criticizing the “Other” side’s government policies because of the military operations.

(iv) Friendly Discourse - Hate Speech Frames

Table 8 results indicate that *Hate Speech Frame* usage is very low in AA and TASS news stories ($n = 13$). During the *Euphrates Shield Operation*, only AA used $n = 10$ hate speech frames, and $n = 298$ news stories did not have either friendly discourse or hate speech frames.

Journalism practices

In this section of the findings, we evaluated the journalism practices of both AA and TASS news agencies. We have measured the “Attribution” numbers of the stories used

Table 4. Anti-Westernism frames.

Attacking Elite (Anti-Westernism)	Operation					Total
	Euphrates Shield Operation	Olive Branch Operation	Peace Spring Operation			
Europe the EU1.2.1	Agency	Anatolia Agency	Count	42	131	197
			% of Total	14.8%	46.3%	69.6%
		TASS	Count	38	31	86
			% of Total	13.4%	11.0%	30.4%
The US1.2.2	Total		Count	80	162	283
			% of Total	28.3%	57.2%	100.0%
	Agency	Anatolia Agency	Count	36	130	192
			% of Total	13.2%	47.6%	70.3%
NATO1.2.3		TASS	Count	35	30	81
			% of Total	12.8%	11.0%	29.7%
	Total		Count	71	160	273
			% of Total	26.0%	58.6%	100.0%
NATO1.2.3	Agency	Anatolia Agency	Count	44	145	216
			% of Total	14.2%	46.8%	69.7%
		TASS	Count	40	36	94
			% of Total	12.9%	11.6%	30.3%
Total			Count	84	181	310
			% of Total	27.1%	58.4%	100.0%

Table 5. Other in the self, self and other frames crosstabulations frequencies in the news stories.

Other in the Self Self and Other	Agency	Anatolia Agency	Operation				Total	
			Euphrates Shield Operation					
			Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total		
Negative	Agency	Anatolia Agency	40	17.3%	22	9.5%	136	58.9%
		TASS	6	2.6%	4	1.7%	23	10.0%
	Total		46	19.9%	26	11.3%	159	68.8%
Null	Agency	Anatolia Agency	4	5.0%	5	6.3%	11	13.8%
		TASS	34	42.5%	13	16.3%	13	16.3%
	Total		38	47.5%	18	22.5%	24	30.0%
Positive	Agency	Anatolia Agency	1	50.0%	0	.0%	1	50.0%
		TASS	0	.0%	1	50.0%	1	50.0%
	Total		1	50.0%	1	50.0%	2	100.0%
Both	Agency	Anatolia Agency	1	100.0%	1	100.0%	1	100.0%
	Total		1	100.0%	1	100.0%	1	100.0%

Table 7. Self reflexive - blame the other side frames crosstabulations frequencies in the news stories.

Self reflexive criticism	Agency	Blame the Other Side	Operation					Total
			Operation					
			Euphrates Shield Operation	Olive Branch Operation	Peace Spring Operation			
Negative	Agency	Anatolia Agency	Count	18	4	135	157	
		% of Total	9.8%	2.2%	73.8%	85.8%		
	TASS	Count	3	1	22	26		
		% of Total	1.6%	0.6%	12.0%	14.2%		
Null	Agency	Total	Count	21	5	157	183	
		% of Total	11.5%	2.7%	85.8%	100.0%		
	TASS	Anatolia Agency	Count	28	23	12	63	
		% of Total	21.4%	17.6%	9.2%	48.1%		
Total	Count	37	17	14	68			
	% of Total	28.2%	13.0%	10.7%	51.9%			
			Count	65	40	26	131	
			% of Total	49.6%	30.5%	19.8%	100.0%	

Table 8. Friendly discourse - hate speech frames cross-tabulations frequencies in the news stories.

		Operation				Total
		Euphrates Shield Operation	Olive Branch Operation	Peace Spring Operation		
Negative	Agency	AA	Count	10	3	13
			% of Total	76.9%	23.1%	100.0%
	Total		Count	10	3	13
			% of Total	76.9%	23.1%	100.0%
Null	Agency	AA	Count	35	143	205
			% of Total	11.7%	48.0%	68.8%
		TASS	Count	40	36	93
			% of Total	13.4%	12.1%	31.2%
	Total		Count	75	179	298
			% of Total	25.2%	60.1%	100.0%
Positive	Agency	AA	Count	1	1	2
			% of Total	33.3%	33.3%	66.7%
		TASS	Count	0	0	1
			% of Total	.0%	.0%	33.3%
	Total		Count	1	1	3
			% of Total	33.3%	33.3%	100.0%

Table 9. Journalism practices of the AA and TASS: attribution.

			Operation				Total
			Euphrates Shield Operation	Olive Branch Operation	Peace Spring Operation		
Attribution to Foreign Source	Agency	Anatolia Agency TASS	24	10	60	94	
		Count	15.7%	6.5%	39.2%	61.4%	
		% of Total	25	13	21	59	
		Count	16.3%	8.5%	13.7%	38.6%	
	Total	Count	49	23	81	153	
		% of Total	32.0%	15.0%	52.9%	100.0%	
Attribution to Domestic Source	Agency	Anatolia Agency TASS	7	5	45	57	
		Count	6.7%	4.8%	43.3%	54.8%	
		% of Total	39	0	8	47	
		Count	37.5%	.0%	7.7%	45.2%	
	Total	Count	46	5	53	104	
		% of Total	44.2%	4.8%	51.0%	100.0%	

Percentages and totals are based on responses.

^aDichotomy group tabulated at value 0.

by the AA and TASS correspondents. The main purpose of this is to understand whether the citations made by the agencies are to a domestic source or a foreign source. Domestic sources can be government, state authorities, civic society, public, experts, etc. from their nations. Foreign sources can be defined as government, state authorities, civic society, public, experts, etc. from outside the news agencies and nations. Table 9 indicates that AA and TASS mostly used foreign sources ($n = 153$) instead of domestic sources ($n = 104$). Since news agencies are used as a mediated public diplomacy tool, it is significant to use foreign sources more. In this way, by attracting the attention of foreign agencies, they can enter the agenda of the relevant countries more easily.

Conclusion

Many states use national news agencies as a tool of public diplomacy in times of war and conflict. Agencies are especially preferred to inform the international arena, legitimize their positions, and increase the country's image and soft power. The status sought by states during wars and conflicts is generally to inform the international public opinion and to legitimize its justifications. During the three military operations launched by the Turkish Army on the Syrian border, the Turkish AA and the Russian state agency TASS covered the operations and announced them to the international arena.

When we look at the results in general, the AA and the TASS news agencies have used anti-Western and war journalism frames more in three Syria operations. The four news frames under war journalism (i) Self and other, (ii) Just war, (iii) Blame the other side, and (iv) Hate speech were used more by AA and TASS than peace journalism frames. Although these results are related to conventional journalistic news values, agencies' greater use of conflict frames can be interpreted as a tool used to impose their positions on the international community. When the results are evaluated in terms of peace journalism news values and frames, it can be said that national news agencies do not protect these values during wars and conflicts. The frames of "self-reflexive," "common ground," "other in the self," and "friendly discourse," which we hardly see on the news during operations, show that national agents are trying to tell us that they are the definitive means of resolution of conflicts rather than soft power. Russia and Turkey are trying to carry out public diplomacy through their agencies through the media, but because their agents use intense conflict frameworks—let alone projecting soft power—the news functions as "propaganda" and is not good public diplomacy for the images of these countries. Moreover, it could be argued that the AA and the TASS as mediated public diplomacy tools project "negative soft power" to use the term of Cull (2009), rather than increase the attraction of both countries in the international arena. As the news agencies used anti-Western and war journalism frames more in the three Syria operations, this study emphasizes some implementation strategies toward improving the journalism practices of those countries. For example, mediated public diplomacy approach could benefit from the effective implementation of peace journalism principles that encourage journalists to seek a "common ground" or seek the "other in the self" by creating a sphere in which participatory collaborative communication processes are

established to bolster the development of NPD rather than such practices which facilitate the functioning of news as propaganda.

In a nutshell, while those operations are being reported, national agencies step in to legitimize the national theses and reasons for the conflict between the countries. However, the monologic and conflictive language that the agencies (AA and TASS), which are media tools of status-seeking countries of Russia and Turkey, adopted to wield soft power related to the operation could not provide the desired public diplomacy.

This study covers the agencies of two countries. For future studies, one can look at how public diplomacy and media relations work in countries other than the West. In addition, the role of alternative media in public diplomacy is an area that needs to be studied.


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Notes

1. Ideally, particularly while covering the conflicts, the news should be balanced, fair, and accurate. Put differently, the journalist should transparently report the conflict between the parties and research the history and cultural background of the events while writing the news.
2. It was founded on April 6, 1920. According to its official website (2021), the AA was founded for supporting the national struggle of the Republic of Turkey in the war of liberation. The main purpose of this foundation is not only to inform people of the country it is also “had to defend the National Struggle in the world, inform the world public opinion on Turkey’s rightful demands and act carefully against tricks of some circles.” Since R. Tayyip Erdoğan led the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) took power, the AA has been restructured to closely follow its policy line. In this vein, Irak (2016) notes, particularly in the last term of the AK Party’s incumbency, a small group close to the party cadre has been controlling editorial policies of public news producers, including the AA. Like in other Western countries, Turkish

news agencies have played a crucial role in shaping the AK Party led Turkey's public diplomacy.

3. TASS was founded on September 1, 1904. It is the first official news agency of Russia. According to TASS's official website (2021), "The agency [TASS] had to report within the Empire and abroad political, financial, economic, trade and other data of public interest." TASS also enjoyed the "exclusive right to gather and distribute information outside the Soviet Union, as well as the right to distribute foreign and domestic information within the Soviet Union and manage the news agencies of the Soviet republics." By the same token, modern Russia has been utilizing various media outlets to propagate its narrative and stances in international issues (Just, 2016).

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