

Hacking the Palestinian Bid for Statehood

An Exploration of the Information Communications Technology Sector as a Tool
for Public Diplomacy

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Introduction.

In December 2016, the United National Security Council (UNSC) passed resolution 2334,¹ designating Israeli settlements in Palestinian-claimed areas of the West Bank and East Jerusalem illegal under international law. While condemnation of Israel is certainly nothing new at the United Nations,² the United States' decision to abstain from blocking the resolution came as both a surprise after more than 40 years of staunch support for Israel at the UNSC. Days later, Secretary of State John Kerry defended the vote, saying the United States allowed passage of Resolution 2334 in order to preserve the possibility of peace and the viability of a two-state solution.³

For his part, Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas celebrated the vote as both a moral victory and an important step in lobbying the international community for support. As peace process expert David Makovsky noted, "undoubtedly, the resolution will be viewed as the most important achievement in the PA's effort to internationalize the conflict to date, especially given the widespread Palestinian belief

¹ United Nations. "Israel's Settlements Have No Legal Validity, Constitute Flagrant Violation of International Law, Security Council Reaffirms," News Release, Dec 23, 2016. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12657.doc.htm>

² Muravchik, Joshua. "The UN and Israel: A History of Discrimination." *World Affairs Journal*, November/December 2013. Accessed April 05, 2017. <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/un-and-israel-history-discrimination>.

³ Morello, Carol, and Ruth Eglash. "Kerry Harshly Condemns Israeli Settler Activity as an Obstacle to Peace." Accessed February 9, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/kerry-address-middle-east-peace-process-amid-deep-us-israel-strains/2016/12/28/d656e5fa-cd0a-11e6-b8a2-8c2a61b0436f_story.html?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main_usisrael-1135am:homepage/story&utm_term=.071973a26a43&tid=a_inl.

that direct talks will achieve little or nothing.”⁴ Israel has long warned that appealing directly to the United Nations would be completely counterproductive to peace negotiations and galvanize Israeli hardliners who do not think a two state solution is possible; now, it seems that hypothesis will finally be put to the test.

Making the Case for a Palestinian State.

Despite the risk of fallout with the Israeli government, it’s hardly surprising that Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas has gone all-in with an international appeal. More than 20 years after the Oslo Peace Accords⁵ paved the way for a two-state solution, Palestinians have little to show for decades of bilateral negotiations with Israel for an independent state. Where they have made progress, however, is at the United Nations. Since 2011, Palestinian diplomacy has focused almost singularly on making the State of Palestine the 194th member of the United Nations.⁶ In November 2012, the United Nations General Assembly approved the PLO’s draft resolution according non-member observer state status to Palestine. Since then, the PLO has taken other unilateral steps

⁴ Makovsky, David. *Early Implications of the UN Settlements Resolution - The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. Issue brief no. 2739. December 27, 2016. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/early-implications-of-the-un-settlements-resolution>.

⁵ The Oslo Accords are a set of agreements between the government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) which resulted in the recognition by the PLO of the State of Israel and the recognition by Israel of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and as a partner in negotiations. The accords marked the start of the Oslo peace process, which seeks to fulfill the "right of the Palestinian people to self-determination."

⁶ Also known as the 194 campaign; See "Palestinians Launch UN State Campaign." *The Telegraph*. September 08, 2011. Accessed March 05, 2017. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/palestinianauthority/8750181/Palestinians-launch-UN-state-campaign.html>.

to join other international bodies, including the International Criminal Court in March 2015⁷ which would ostensibly allow it to pursue means to prosecute Israel for war crimes.

Now that Israel has effectively severed ties with the PA for the time being, strengthening ties with other countries is absolutely critical to sustain momentum behind the statehood bid. Fortunately for the PA, the Palestinian cause has long held a deep international appeal. Beginning with the establishment of the PLO in 1964, the issue of Palestinian statehood has steadily evolved from a regional geopolitical issue to a cause for global solidarity. In the 1960s and 1970s, the cause was framed as a struggle for national liberation during a period when liberation and human rights were foregrounded in anti-colonialist battles across the world.⁸ As Historian Paul Chamberlain notes, “by casting themselves as liberation fighters, the guerrillas were able to access networks of international support emanating from revolutionary centers [...] and to become a focus of the international press.”⁹ The PLO formally became the sole representative of the Palestinian people to the international community when it gained observer status at the United Nations General Assembly in 1974 -- the first liberation movement to do so.

Despite a strong track record at the United Nations, Palestine’s scorecard on

⁷ "Will ICC Membership Help or Hinder the Palestinians' Cause?" BBC News. April 01, 2015. Accessed January 13, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30744701>.

⁸ Sourì, Helga Tawil. "Media, Globalization, and the (Un)Making of the Palestinian Cause." *Popular Communication* 13, no. 2 (May 07, 2015): 145-57. Accessed October 14, 2017. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15405702.2015.1021470?scroll=top&needAccess=true>.

⁹ Chamberlain, Paul. "The Struggle Against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation." *Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 1 (January 06, 2011): 25-41. Accessed November 13, 2016. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00263201003590300>.

successfully shaping public opinion in the United States is decidedly mixed. Since the Pew Research Center began tracking American attitudes towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict almost four decades ago, the number of Americans who say they sympathize more with Israel remains significantly higher than those who support the Palestinians. Pew's most recent survey in 2016¹⁰ found that the number of respondents who favored Israel was almost triple those who favored the Palestinians: 54% to 19%.¹¹ It also concluded that the majority of Americans ultimately pick sides: only about one-in-ten (13%) volunteered that they support neither Israel nor the Palestinians in their dispute, and only 3% said they sympathized with both parties.

Chief among the current challenges the PLO faces in cultivating American support are enduring perceptions of corruption and allegations of undermining peace. In the two decades since Oslo, violence and political chaos have dominated American media coverage of the Palestinians. First, after several years of unsuccessful negotiations to implement the accords, mounting protests against Israel erupted into the Second Intifada, a period of violence between the two parties spanning from September 2000 - 2005. After five years of unrest, then Israeli Prime Minister Sharon ordered the removal of Israeli settlers and soldiers from the Gaza Strip in compliance with Oslo, formally declaring an end to the Israeli occupation there. Barely four months after

¹⁰ "Public Uncertain, Divided Over America's Place in the World." Pew Research Center, May 5, 2016. <http://www.people-press.org/2016/05/05/public-uncertain-divided-over-americas-place-in-the-world/>

¹¹ Smith, Samantha and Carroll Doherty. "5 facts about how Americans view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict." Pew Research Center, May 23, 2016. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/05/23/5-facts-about-how-americans-view-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict/>

withdrawal, the US-designated terrorist group Hamas won legislative elections in the Palestinian territories sending Gaza spiraling into a violent turf war between the victors and the incumbent ruling party, Fatah.

For American observers, the last ten years have been unmitigated catastrophe for the establishment of a Palestinian state. In addition to a civil war between Palestinian factions, the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip has had four wars with Israel which have killed more than 4,000 Gazans and destroyed tens of thousands of homes. Meanwhile, in the West Bank, the ruling Fatah party hasn't held elections since 2005. President Mahmoud Abbas is entering his twelfth year in office (of a four-year term).

There are also negative perceptions of Palestinian culture to contend with. During the 2012 U.S. Presidential campaign, Mitt Romney suggested that cultural differences were to blame for Palestine's ailing economy:

“Culture makes all the difference,” Mr. Romney said. “[...] you see the G.D.P. per capita, for instance, in Israel, which is about \$21,000, and compare that with the G.D.P. per capita just across the areas managed by the Palestinian Authority, which is more like \$10,000 per capita, you notice such a dramatically stark difference in economic vitality.”¹²

¹² Parker, Ashley. “Romney Angers Palestinians with Comments in Israel,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/31/us/politics/romney-angers-palestinians-with-comments-in-israel.html>

The comment, roundly criticized by Palestinian leaders and other experts for failing to take into account the toll of the Israeli occupation, represents a widely held perception by Western policymakers that the Palestinian Authority is at best dysfunctional and at worst, corrupt. Former National Security Advisor Elliot Abrams once testified before the US Congress that, as an American official seeking financial assistance for the PA from Gulf Arab governments, he was often told “why should we give them money when their officials will just steal it?”¹³ And it’s not just the Americans: in 2013, the European Court of Auditors reported that the PA may have misspent up \$3.13 billion of European Union financial aid between 2008 and 2012.¹⁴

Fortunately, the Palestinians potentially have a powerful re-branding tool at their disposal to address these concerns head on: a small, but dynamic Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector. Largely viewed as insulated from government corruption, the explosive growth of Palestine’s high-tech scene has been lauded in American mainstream media coverage as a potential game changer for the Palestinian economy. Consider the following from the *New York Times* in 2012:

“Compared with other industries that the anemic West Bank economy might look to develop, the information and communications technology sector has an

¹³ Abrams, Elliott. "Chronic Kleptocracy: Corruption Within the Palestinian Political Establishment." Council on Foreign Relations. July 10, 2012. Accessed April 15, 2017.

http://www.cfr.org/palestine/chronic-kleptocracy-corruption-within-palestinian-political-establishment/p28689?cid=rss-fullfeed-chronic_kleptocracy__corruptio-071012.

¹⁴ <http://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=638853>

advantage: it is much less affected by impediments to movement, like the barriers, checkpoints and permit requirements that Israel imposes on the territory in the name of security.”¹⁵

By 2012, the tech sector had grown from less than 1 percent of the Palestinian economy to more than 5 percent in just four years.¹⁶ Outside investment had increased by 64% during the same period to the tune of \$78 million – including a \$15 million investment from multinational tech giant Cisco to jumpstart the Palestinian outsourcing sector.¹⁷ Today, roughly 5,000 individuals, or 3% of the Palestinian workforce, are responsible for 8% of the economic output.¹⁸ Even though growth has stalled in recent years,¹⁹ production levels remain steady and the tech sector has become a focus of study for well-respected international organizations who view economic development as

¹⁵Kershner, Isabel. "West Bank's Emerging Silicon Valley Evades Issues of Borders." The New York Times. July 29, 2012. Accessed July 21, 2016.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/30/world/middleeast/palestinians-building-tech-hub-in-west-bank.html?mtrref=undefined&gwh=3F4E4A62D8FBDBE51FC9E75257323FC7&gwt=pay>.

¹⁶Abukumail, Ali, "The Palestinian Information Technology Association of Companies (PITA): Moving Forward on ICT and Innovation," Issue brief no. 80. January 2013. Accessed October 15, 2016.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/20571/752170BRI0Box30ial0Use0Only0600QN80.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

¹⁷ CISCO. *Palestine Investment Commitment*. Report. July 2013. Accessed April 2, 2017.

https://www.cisco.com/assets/csr/pdf/Palestine_Exec_Brief.pdf.

¹⁸ Solutions for Development Consulting Co. *Palestinian ICT Sector 2.0: Technology Sector Development Report and Recommendations Relevant to Regional and Global Market Opportunities*. Report. April 2013.

Accessed February 09, 2017. [http://techpresident.com/files/MC-PITA_Palestinian_ICT_Sector_2_0_Report%20\(5\).pdf](http://techpresident.com/files/MC-PITA_Palestinian_ICT_Sector_2_0_Report%20(5).pdf).

¹⁹ "Palestine's Economic Outlook- Spring 2016." World Bank. Accessed March 24, 2017.

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/westbankandgaza/publication/economic-outlook-spring-2016>.

a proxy for peace. For example, the World Bank,²⁰ the Office of the Quartet,²¹ and The Portland Trust,²² a British think tank, have all released publications linking the ICT sector to successful private sector expansion in the West Bank and Gaza.

Whether a sign of the tech sector's deep global appeal or genuine interest in the development of the Palestinian economy, coverage of the Palestinian ICT sector has created an opportunity to promote a non-conflict related narrative about Palestinians. Certainly, the moment is not lost on the Palestinian elite. In recent *Forbes* magazine profile on Rawabi, the largest privately planned and funded project in Palestinian history and a growing ICT hub, founder Bashar Masri remarked, "The world is very sympathetic to the Palestinian people as victims, but not as peace-builders. We want them to see us as peace-builders."²³

The purpose of this paper is to understand if international attention devoted to the Palestinian ICT sector can achieve Mr. Masri's wish, and lead to an increase in support and/or sympathy for Palestinian statehood in the United States. Specifically, I'm interested in understanding how effective the ICT sector is as a tool for public diplomacy.

²⁰ *Towards Economic Sustainability of a Future Palestinian State: Promoting Private Sector Growth*. Working paper. April 2012. Accessed January 25, 2017. http://www.lacs.ps/documentsShow.aspx?ATT_ID=5929.

²¹ "OQR Strategy for Private Sector Development." OQR Strategy for Private Sector Development | Office of the Quartet Representative. Accessed February 13, 2017. <http://www.tonyblairoffice.org/quartet/pages/oqr-strategy-for-private-sector-development>.

²² *Beyond Aid: A Palestinian Private Sector Initiative for Investment, Growth and Employment*. Report. November 2013. Accessed April 20, 2017. <http://www.portlandtrust.org/publications/beyond-aid-palestinian-private-sector-initiative-investment-growth-and-employment>.

²³ Wang, Monica. "One Man's Dream City Rises In The Occupied West Bank." *Forbes*, July 07, 2016. Accessed January 05, 2017. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/monicawang/2016/07/06/one-mans-dream-city-rises-in-the-occupied-west-bank/2/#1ae27cbb1c3a>.

I propose to assess this relationship by answering the following question:

“To what extent does the Palestinian ICT sector contribute to the Palestinian bid for statehood?”

Analytical Framework.

In order to assess if the tech sector has contributed to a more positive perception of the Palestinians, I rely on a two-tiered process. First, I conduct a content analysis of major news outlets as a proxy for American public opinion. I then use my findings to consider how media framing may shape specific economic and political outcomes.

Framing analysis is useful because it underlines trends in how the general public perceives and understands the Palestinian quest for statehood. In mass communications theory, framing is manifested in 1) the amount of media coverage of a particular conflict and 2) the language used to describe the actors and events in that conflict. The type of framing employed determines whether the public will empathize with one of the sides involved or feel detached from events taking place far from them.

The literature on media framing theory is vast;²⁴ however, the scholarship can generally be divided into two main focuses: framing to gain media access and framing to produce media effects. Since this paper is ultimately concerned with foreign policy outcomes, I will use Robert Entman’s definition -- which focuses on media framing effects -- in my content analysis.

²⁴ Baum, Matthew A., and Philip B.k. Potter. "The Relationships Between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis." *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (2008): 39-65. doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060406.214132.

Entman defines framing as “the process of selecting and highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality, and enhancing the salience of an interpretation and evaluation of that reality.”²⁵ Under his definition, the media plays an active role in interpreting events for its readership as opposed to serving a neutral arbiter of information. To put it another way: the press decides if the Palestinians are crusaders for justice or violent antagonists to the peace process by the way they present the details of a particular story.

This is why we are not only interested in the frames used in a given moment, but in charting the “framing” of Palestine in mainstream media coverage over time. Through longitudinal trends in coverage, we can better understand how the public and policymakers alike perceive and understand the Palestinian quest for statehood.

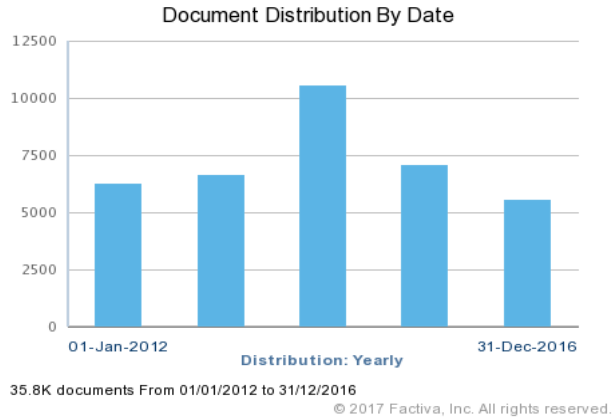
Understanding Macro Trends in Coverage.

In order to understand the extent to which the tech sector has shaped coverage of the Palestinians, we must first assess trends in coverage more broadly. I used Dow Jones’ Factiva database to produce 5, 10, and 20-year snapshots of coverage. Specifically, the following graphs are generated from Factiva’s “Major News and Business Outlets US”²⁶ database.

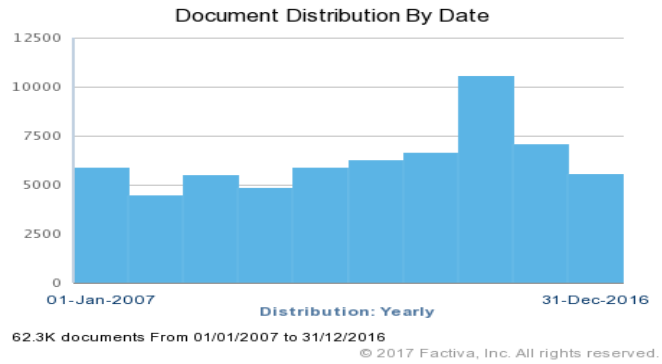
²⁵ Entman, Robert M. "Frames and Related Concepts." In *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 26. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

²⁶ Consists of 113 US-based media sources covering general and business news, including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, ABC News, NBC News, CBS News, Politico, *Los Angeles Times*, and more.

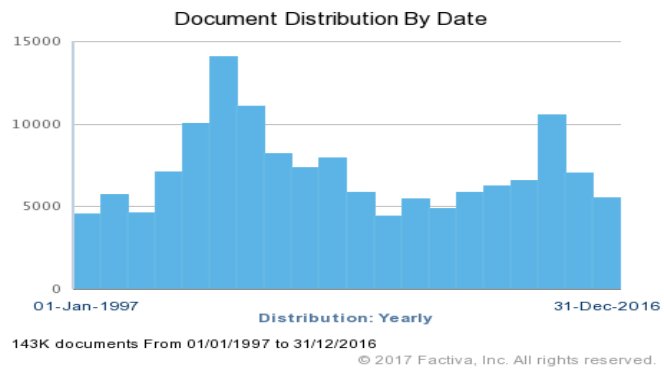
Five Year Outlook



Ten Year Outlook



Twenty Year Outlook



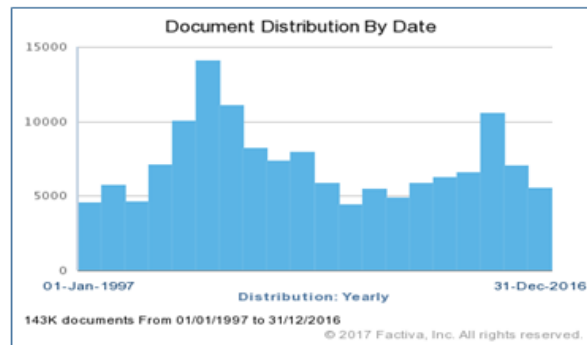
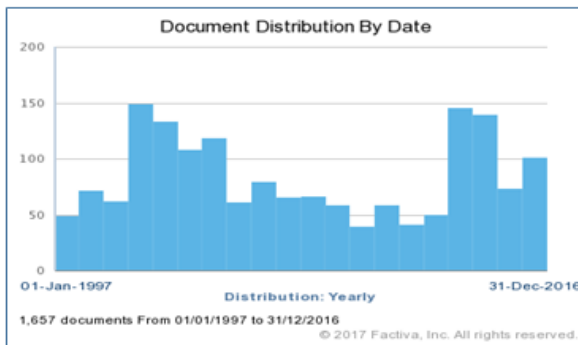
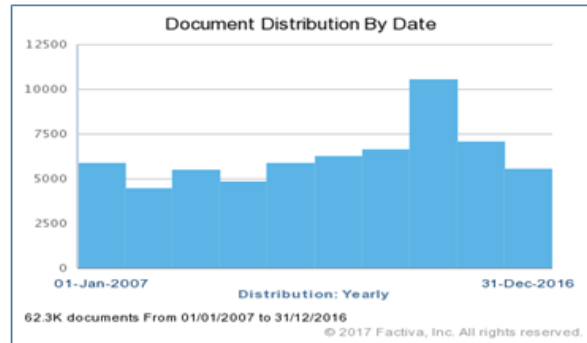
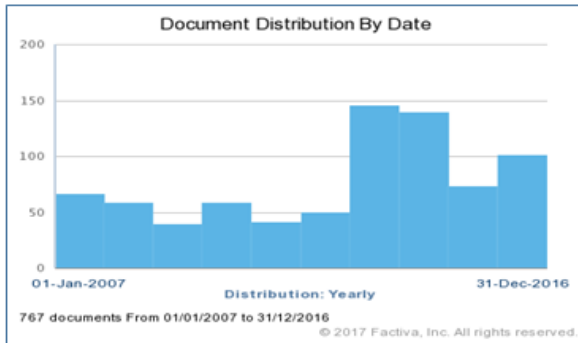
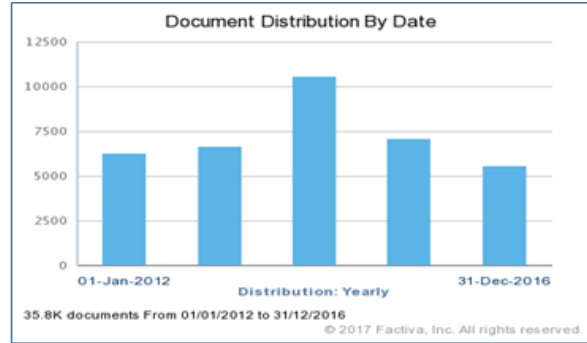
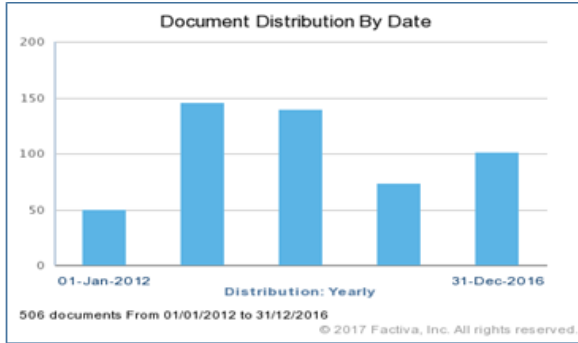
Using these three samples, some obvious trends emerge. First, coverage is deeply cyclical: media attention spikes around violence, and then drops off in the immediate aftermath. There are two spikes in coverage. The first spike occurs at the peak of the Second Intifada in 2002. The second doesn't happen until 2014, when a rapid escalation of violence between Israel and Hamas lead to a 90 day Israeli ground invasion of the Gaza Strip.

Second, despite swells around violence, news coverage of the Palestinians is on the net decline since the peak of the Second Intifada. Since 2002, America has had plenty of challenges and obligations in the Middle East which have nothing to do with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. A brutal and expensive war in Iraq, the danger of a nuclear Iran, and the rise and crashing fall of democratic uprisings across the Arab World in 2011 are just some of the things which have eclipsed coverage of the conflict in the last decade. Volume of coverage is significant if only because it increases opportunities for new narratives and understandings to emerge. Without sufficient volume, public diplomacy through the press is a pointless exercise.

Next, we can look at trends in tech coverage compared to overall coverage. As we can see in the figures listed on the Y axes, coverage which features both "Palestin*" and "high-tech" is far more limited. Whereas articles featuring "Palestin*" can number between 5,000 -110,000 a year, those also featuring "high-tech" fall into the much more modest 50 – 150 range.

Tech

General



After getting an initial snapshot, the analysis then considers the variety and types of frames used in coverage during three different months between 2012 and 2016: May 2013, January 2015, and August 2016. Months were chosen based on the presence of three key events in the Palestinian tech sector: Google’s decision to give Palestine its

own country search portal, Silicon Valley's investment in the Gaza Strip's first incubator Sky Geeks, and the quasi-scandal around the absence of "Palestine" in Google Maps. The time periods were also chosen for being relatively equidistant to one another as well as relatively distance to the fighting between Israel and Hamas during the summer of 2014.²⁷

Coverage analyzed in those months consists of leading outlets across print, radio and television which are major sources of international news coverage for Americans. This includes the Associated Press, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *National Public Radio*, and CNN as well as the Economist Magazine, the " bible of global affairs for those who wear aspirations of worldliness on their sleeves."²⁸

Here, I focus on two main questions:

- 1. How has the Palestinian ICT sector been framed in mainstream media coverage in the United States since 2012?**
- 2. How does this compare to mainstream media coverage in the US about Palestine since 2012?**

²⁷Known as the Israel-Gaza conflict, the seven-week battle occurred from July - August 2014 following the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers by Hamas members and rapid escalation in violence by both parties. Palestinian rocket attacks and the ground fighting resulted in the death of thousands of people, the vast majority of them Gazans.

²⁸Peters, Jeremy W. "The Economist Tends Its Sophisticate Garden." *The New York Times*. August 08, 2010. Accessed February 12, 2017.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/09/business/media/09economist.html>.

For the framing analysis, coverage is separated into two groups: articles which used a positive frame and those which employed a negative frame. Here, I borrow from the methodology John Noakes lays out in his study on shifting frames of the Palestinian movement in US News during the 80s and 90s.²⁹ In order for an article to be considered, the word “Palestine” or “Palestinian” has to appear in the first three paragraphs of the story. Then, coverage is categorized under three possible subframes. The following table illustrates how frames are categorized as negative or positive, and then into respective sub-frames:

Positive		Negative	
Frame	Example	Frame	Example
Fighting injustice	not be attending "based on advice from Palestinian academics that he should respect the boycott."	Passive victim	"protest Israel's policies toward the Palestinians" ³⁰
Seeking peace	"Palestinian business moguls gave their own impassioned call for negotiations, saying that "the status quo, fraught with shattered hopes, is unsustainable and	Aggressor	"...voiced his support for rocket fire on Israel, giving a boost of legitimacy to the militant Islamist Hamas rulers of the Palestinian

²⁹ Noakes, John A., and Karin Gwinn Wilkins. "Shifting Frames of the Palestinian Movement in US News." *Media, Culture & Society* 24, no. 5 (2002): 649-71. Accessed January 05, 2016. doi:10.1177/016344370202400506.

³⁰Kershner, Isabel. "Stephen Hawking Joins Boycott Against Israel." *The New York Times*. May 08, 2013. Accessed January 13, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/09/world/middleeast/stephen-hawking-joins-boycott-against-israel.html>.

	dangerous.” ³¹		territory.” ³²
Normal	Gaza is not just this place of terrorists and criminals but nice people ³³	Dysfunctional	“Palestinian paralysis and disarray”

Events are not covered by exclusively positive or negative frames, per say. There are several examples of one media outlet leading with a positive frame and one with a negative frame while covering the same story. For example, the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* both reported on world renowned physicist Stephen Hawking’s decision to boycott a prestigious academic conference in Israel, but framed Palestinian agency in the event in different ways.

Washington Post

According to the report, Hawking, who was to have been a keynote speaker at Israeli President Shimon Peres’ Presidents Conference, sent a letter to organizers explaining that he had to reconsider his participation after receiving e-

³¹Gordon, Michael R., and Jodi Rudoren. "Trying to Revive Mideast Talks, Kerry Pushes Investment Plan for West Bank." *The New York Times*. May 26, 2013. Accessed January 13, 2017.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/27/world/middleeast/peres-says-israel-must-overcome-skepticism-about-peace.html?action=click&contentCollection=Middle%2BEast&module=RelatedCoverage@ion=Marginalia&pgtype=article>.

³² Barzak, Ibrahim. "Islamic Cleric in Gaza Rejects Israel's Existence." Associated Press, Republished: The Huffington Post. Accessed April 22, 2017. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/huff-wires/20130509/ml-palestinians-muslim-cleric/>.

³³Booth, William. "Singer from Gaza Wants to Be 'Arab Idol'." *The Washington Post*. May 27, 2013. Accessed January 13, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/singer-from-gaza-wants-to-be-arab-idol/2013/05/27/4b080ba4-c553-11e2-9642-a56177f1cdf7_story.html?utm_term=.368b93cd479a.

mails from Palestinian academics calling for him to “respect the boycott.”³⁴

New York Times

The academic and cultural boycott, organized by international activists to protest Israel's policies toward the Palestinians, is a heated and contentious issue; having Dr. Hawking join it is likely to help the anti-Israel campaigners significantly.³⁵

In the *Washington Post* article, the author credits the Palestinians for convincing the physicist to honor the boycott. In contrast, the *New York Times* paints them as passive bystanders in a battle between international activists and Israel.

Neutral frames are also possible. For example, the article may feature coverage of the Palestinians, but as through the perspective of a third party. Take the following article from the Associated Press:

China's premier has urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to remove obstacles to restarting talks with the Palestinians, as Beijing seeks to bring its growing international influence to bear on the Middle East peace process.³⁶

³⁴Eglash, Ruth. "Stephen Hawking Boycotts Jerusalem Conference, Sparking Controversy in Israel." *The Washington Post*. May 08, 2013. Accessed January 13, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/05/08/stephen-hawking-boycotts-jerusalem-conference-sparking-controversy-in-israel/?utm_term=.0f6f2a611dce.

³⁵Kershner, "Stephen Hawking Joins Boycott Against Israel," *The New York Times*. May 08, 2013.

³⁶Wee, Sui-Lee. "China's Xi Urges Netanyahu to Restart Peace Talks." *AP/Reuters*. May 09, 2013.

While the article does mention the Palestinians, it does not give them any agency or defining characteristics which we can then use to extrapolate a positive or negative perception. While neutral frames did occur periodically within each of the three months analyzed, overall they were rare. They were present in three out of 33 articles in May 2013, three out of 38 articles in January 2015, and two out of 26 articles in August 2016.

What I expect to find.

Each possibility is relatively straightforward:

- Under a status quo scenario, the analysis will reveal that coverage of the ICT sector has had no measurable impact on the perception of the Palestinian state in the news media relative to general coverage.
- Under the negative impact scenario, the ICT sector has promoted an unfavorable view of the Palestinians. For example, if the ICT sector is characterized as corrupt or responsible for unfairly siphoning off jobs from other countries.

Under a positive impact scenario, there are actually two distinct possible outcomes.

Accessed January 22, 2017. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-israel-talks-idUSBRE94903H20130510>.

- The first is a limited positive impact, in which the ICT sector promotes a favorable narrative around the Palestinians, but negative frames of the Palestinians still dominate media coverage.
- For the ICT sector to have had a strong positive effect, it will need to not only promote a compelling narrative, but demonstrably shifted the ratio of positive vs. negative frames in media coverage.

Given the macro trends established earlier, I expect to confirm that the tech sector has had a limited positive impact on the perception of the Palestinians, which are still largely framed through geopolitics.

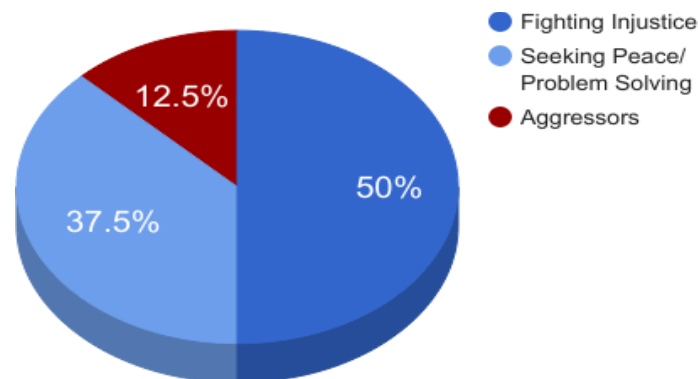
Content Analysis.

Overall, 91 articles met the threshold for consideration: 30 in May 2013, 35 in January 2015, and 26 in August 2016. The vast majority of coverage centered on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, with some exceptions for ICT coverage and coverage of the Palestinian national soccer team. First, I will look at how the ICT sector was framed across specific outlets during this period. Next I will compare my findings with coverage of the Palestinians during this time as a whole. Finally, I will use both answers to inform a broader discussion of their implications for the ICT sector as a mechanism for public diplomacy.

1. How has the Palestinian ICT sector been framed in mainstream media coverage in the United States since 2012?

News coverage of Palestinian high-tech sector has been overwhelmingly positive, with only one article out of eight total employing a negative frame. The single negative frame was the author's response to anti-Semitic comments made by international activists outraged over the possible deletion of "Palestine" from Google Maps, and not elicited from the response of the Palestinians themselves.

Exhibit 1: Frames used in ICT coverage³⁷



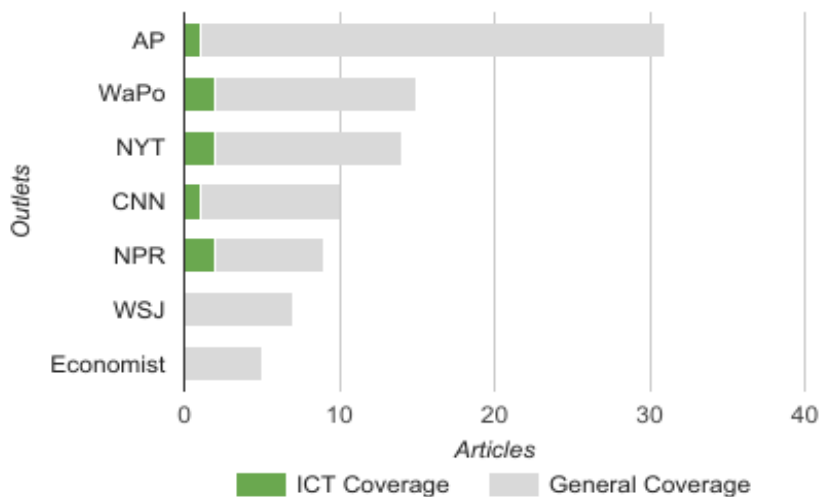
Of the seven possible frames, only three were used in coverage of the ICT sector: "fighting injustice"; "seeking peace/problem solving"; and "aggressor" from the article just described. The frame "fighting injustice" was used slightly more than "seeking peace/problem solving," (four to three), and overall was far and away the

³⁷ For a complete breakdown of numbers and analysis, see Appendix A.

most-used positive frame in coverage of the Palestinians. The almost equal use of the “seeking peace/problem solving” is of particular interest; it occurs almost exclusively within tech coverage, and is much more in line with the view of Palestinians as Bashar Masri put it: “problem solvers.”

However, coverage of the high-tech sector only accounts for roughly 8.8% of total coverage, calling into question its ability to truly act as a mechanism for changing public opinion.

Exhibit 2: Portion of ICT Coverage in Total Coverage



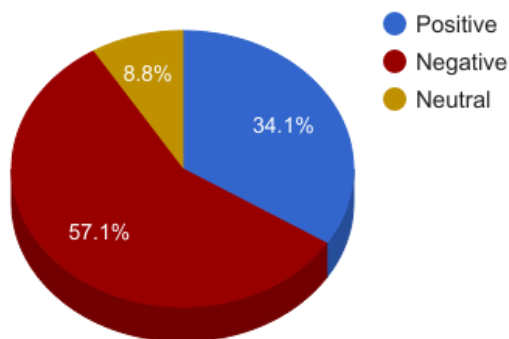
Also problematic: tech coverage is not equally dispersed throughout the seven outlets considered. While I expected to find a range of tech coverage relative to total coverage within the seven outlets, I did not expect to find that some outlets featured no coverage at all. Both the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Economist* featured no articles on

Google’s decision to give Palestine its own country search portal, Silicon Valley’s investment in Gaza Sky Geeks, or the quasi-scandal around the absence of “Palestine” in Google Maps. Surprising still, lack of coverage of the ICT-sector is not necessarily a proxy for whether or not a publication featured mostly positive or negative frames. As we’ll see in the next section, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Economist* vary significantly in their use of frames.

2. How does this compare to mainstream media coverage in the US about Palestine since 2012?

The paltry amount of ICT coverage becomes even more significant when compared side by side with media coverage overall. Whereas coverage of the ICT sector was mostly positive, mainstream media coverage over the same period skews negative. As you can see, almost 60% of frames are negative compared to only a third of frames that are positive.

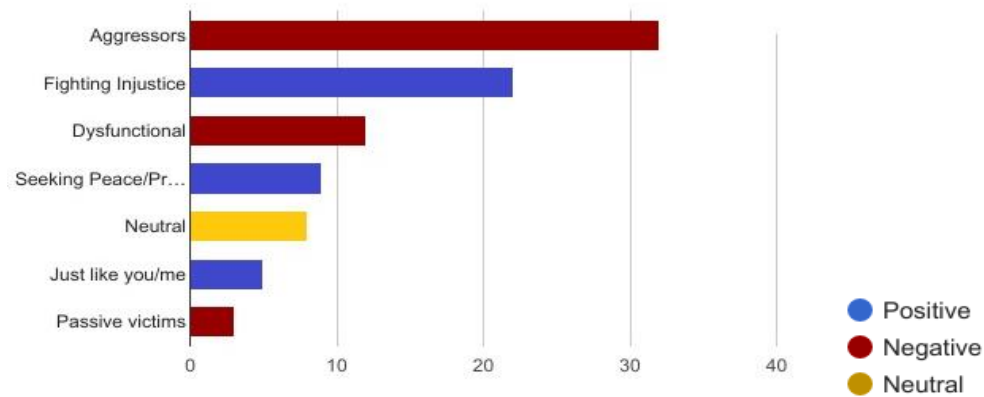
Exhibit 3: Positive vs. Negative Frames (All Coverage)



Given that outlets are relatively consistent in their use of positive and negative frames across all three months, we can assume the samples accurately capture trends in mainstream media coverage. Positive coverage of the ICT sector decreased month over month starting from four in May 2013, to two in January 2015, to just one in August 2016. As ICT coverage decreased over time, so did the number of positive frames relative to total coverage. To put it another way: ICT coverage proved to be one of the rare sources of consistently positive coverage about the Palestinians, at least within these three sample months. Outlets are not choosing between glowing human interest stories: if they choose not to cover the Palestinian ICT sector, there is simply less coverage outside the conflict.

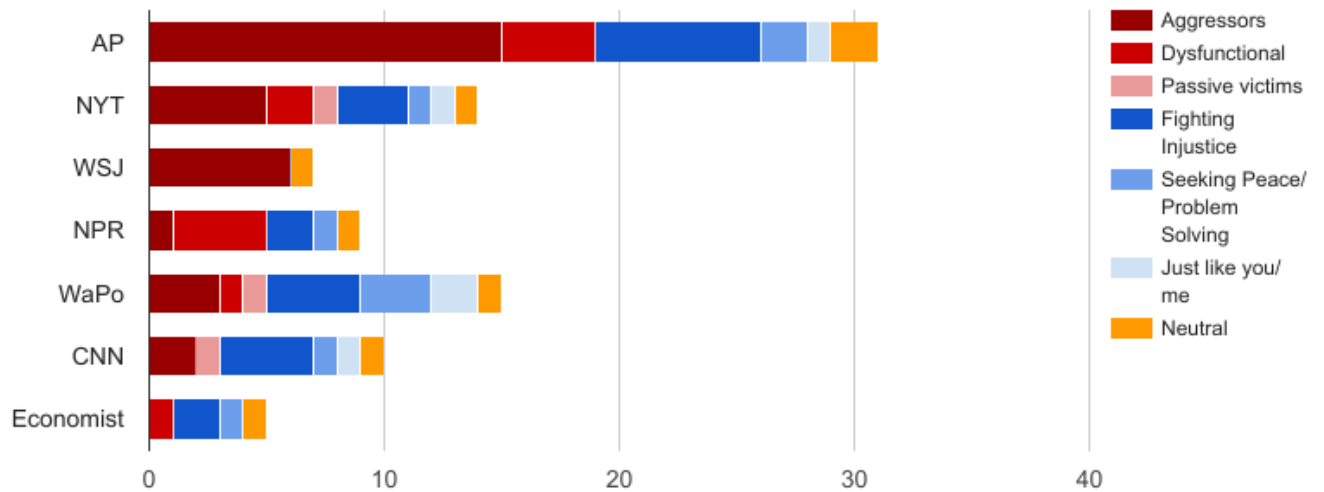
At the sub-frame level, some interesting trends emerge. A little over a third of all frames can be coded under the “aggressor” frame. Combined with the next most-used frame “fighting injustice”, 60% of frames used are explicitly combative in nature. Not only does this trend underscore the dominance of conflict narratives in media coverage of the Palestinians, but also indicates a degree of groupthink around how outlets cover them.

Exhibit 4: Frames Used in All Coverage



Notice, I only say a *degree* of groupthink. When the frames are further broken down by outlet, some clear differences in framing begin to emerge:

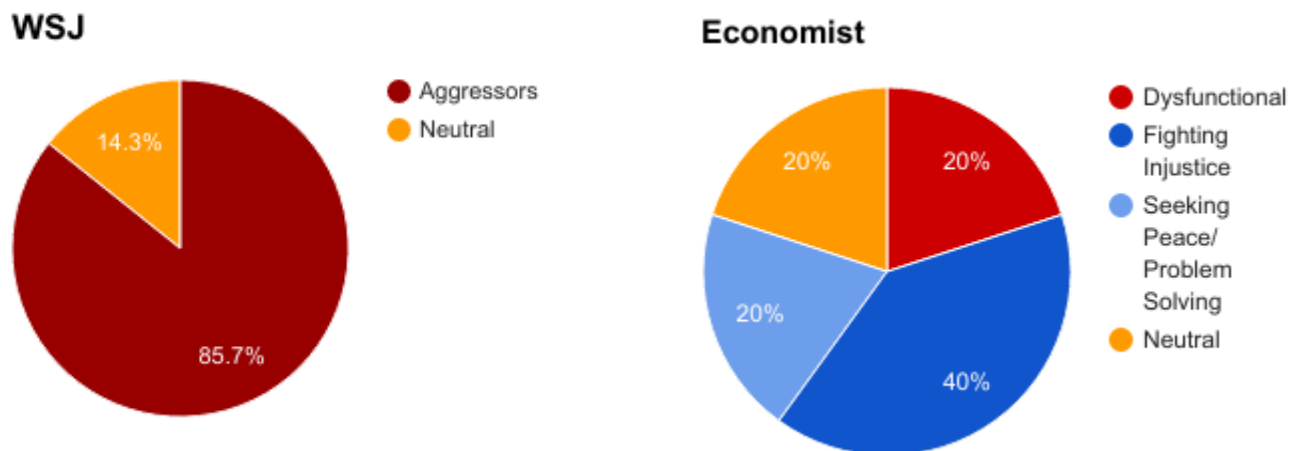
Exhibit 5: Media use of positive and negative subframes



In the outlets where “aggressor” subframes make up the largest portion of frames used, not only does the majority of coverage skew negative, but the ideal positive

subframe -- “seeking peace/problem solving” -- appears less overall relative to outlets where the “aggressor” frame does not dominate. This includes the Associated Press, *New York Times*, and *Wall Street Journal*. NPR’s coverage also skews negative, but for a different reason: a concentration of “dysfunctional” subframes. While I can offer no more than author’s intuition, I do not believe it’s a coincidence that NPR has the highest ratio of ICT coverage to total coverage (see: Exhibit 2) and the second lowest use of the “aggressor” frame. Taken in tandem with similarly low frequency of use in the *Washington Post*, CNN, and the *Economist*, all of which skew positive in their coverage of the Palestinians, a picture begins to emerge about which outlets are the most likely to promote the “seeking peace/problem solving” narrative.

Exhibit 6: Framing in the Wall Street Journal vs. Economist



The *Wall Street Journal* and the *Economist* sit at the two extremes of this analysis. Save for one neutral frame, coverage of the Palestinians in the *Wall Street Journal* exclusively consist of “aggressor” frames. The *Economist*, on the other hand, features no “aggressor” frames, and has one of the highest incidences of positive framing to overall coverage. The only things which connects these two publications is a complete lack of ICT coverage. However, given that ICT coverage across all outlets tends to be positive, and most likely to appear when incidences of the “aggressor” frame are low, the *Economist* is absolutely prime real estate for promotion of the Palestinian ICT sector. If this content analysis has revealed anything, it’s that positive framing in media coverage is more likely to occur if the volume of coverage is already relatively high and the binary frames of “aggressor” and “fighting injustice” don’t dominate. This has some important takeaways for Palestinian public diplomacy going forward.

Implications.

As the old adage goes: if it bleeds, it leads. As a non-corporeal being, the ICT sector is naturally limited in what it can achieve through the press. Given the methodology outlined earlier, we can conclude that the ICT sector has had a limited positive impact on the Palestinian bid for statehood: it may promote a favorable narrative around the Palestinians, but negative frames still dominate media coverage.

This has two key implications for the role of the ICT sector in enhancing the Palestinian Authority's internationalization strategy. First, tapping into traditional buckets of influence simply won't work. While there is some coverage of the Palestinian ICT sector in American news outlets, it tends to appear in niche outlets with names like TechCrunch and Motherboard. Indeed, two of the ICT-linked events used for this analysis were just as much about covering Google as they were about Palestine.

However, this could just mean it's time to focus on a new center of American power: Silicon Valley. Even before the private sector became ascendant in the Age of Trump, Silicon Valley enjoyed a fairly privileged position in Washington. In 2013, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg broke with long standing tradition³⁸ to keep DC at arm's length by lobbying Congress to overhaul immigration reform. Since then, Big Tech has become the fourth biggest spender on lobbyists, sinking almost 120 million into last year's Congressional session.³⁹ The Palestinian Authority wouldn't even be the first country to explicitly reach out to Silicon Valley with diplomatic goals in mind: Denmark recently appointed an ambassador to Silicon Valley to serve as an on-the-ground interlocutor for all Danish-tech relations.⁴⁰

The second implication is amplification. In the era of social media platforms like

³⁸ Gynn, Jessica. "Silicon Valley to Boost Clout in Washington." Los Angeles Times. March 29, 2013. Accessed January 17, 2017. <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/mar/29/business/la-fi-silicon-valley-politics-20130329>.

³⁹ "The Center for Responsive Politics." OpenSecrets.org. Accessed March 20, 2017. <http://www.opensecrets.org/lobby/top.php?showYear=2016&indexType=i>.

⁴⁰ Vanian, Jonathan. "Denmark to Appoint A 'Silicon Valley Ambassador' As If Tech Was Its Own Country." Fortune.com. February 07, 2017. Accessed March 14, 2017. <http://fortune.com/2017/02/06/denmark-ambassador-apple-google/>.

Twitter and Facebook, lack of access to media outlets is not nearly the challenge it once was. The ICT sector is naturally positioned to promote a view of Palestine that's not just separate from government, but can be incubated and disseminated completely independently to the Palestinians' biggest fan club: millennials.

Indeed, the same Pew Research Center survey which found that a majority of Americans say favor Israel also concluded that sympathy for the Palestinians' cause is on the rise. This is largely due to a significant increase in support among millennials⁴¹. In 2006, Millennials and older generations held similar views on the Israel-Palestinian dispute with support hovering around 9%. A decade later, that number has jumped to 27% while the share sympathizing with Israel has stayed relatively constant. Millennials are also the only generational cohort in which fewer than half (43%) sympathize more with Israel.

I do not mean to suggest that an affinity for technology is at the root of changing attitudes towards Palestine among younger Americans; however, for the next generation of digital natives, information about Palestine -- both outside of traditional news outlets and from non-governmental sources -- has never been easier to access.

Information has also never been easier to promote. For example, the Palestinian Information Technology Association (PITA),⁴² which represents 150 major ICT companies in Palestine's emerging technology and startup ecosystem, has a full range

⁴¹ The millennial generation consists of persons born between 1980-2000.

⁴² Palestinian Information Technology Association of Companies. Accessed July 14, 2016. <http://www.pita.ps/>.

of promotional channels in English. Palestine sends a delegation to the Global Entrepreneurship Week conference in Silicon Valley every year, along with untold other international opportunities. In this sense, the ICT sector has spawned a new breed of Palestinian ambassador – which may be for the best. As one incubator manager I met with this summer remarked, “We see our efforts wholly separate from government. It’s best that the two remain separated.”⁴³

Conclusion.

For the Palestinians to continue to build on their internationalization momentum during the Trump era, separating the statehood bid from the dominate themes of conflict and violence will be key. Positive media coverage is not a panacea; There is no amount of good press which can re-integrate the West Bank and Gaza or jumpstart the Palestinian economy. However, the Palestinian ICT sector is well-placed to tap into the shared culture of a global tech movement which may ultimately give the Palestinian story the separation it needs from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to thrive.

⁴³ Thayer, Mahmoud. "Opportunities for Rawabi and Bader Incubator." Interview by author. August 25, 2016.

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All Coverage											
Time	Tech	Positive	Negative	General	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total Articles	Positive	W/out Tech	
May 2013	4	4	0	26	12	11	3	30	53.33%	41.38%	
Jan 2015	2	2	0	33	9	21	3	35	31.43%	25.00%	
August 2016	2	1	1	24	6	14	2	26	26.92%	23.08%	
	8	7	1	83	27	46	8	91	37.36%	29.67%	
Tech Coverage								% of total coverage			
Time	Fighting Injustic	Seeking Peace/l	Just like you/me	Passive victims	Aggressors	Dysfunctional	Neutral		Coverage generally positive (7 of 8 articles) with "fighting injustice" frame slightly dominant over "seeking peace/problem solving." Notable that "seeking peace/problem solving" only occurs within tech coverage and not within general coverage.		
May 2013	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	13.33%			
Jan 2015	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	5.71%			
Aug 2016	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	7.69%			
	4	3	0	0	1	0	0	8.79%			
General Coverage											
Time	Fighting Injustic	Seeking Peace/l	Just like you/me	Passive victims	Aggressors	Dysfunctional	Neutral	Total Articles	Aggressor	Fighting Injustice	Dysfunctional
May 2013	4	5	3	1	7	3	3	26	26.92%	15.38%	11.54%
Jan 2015	7	1	1	1	16	4	3	33	48.48%	21.21%	12.12%
Aug 2016	8	0	0	1	8	5	2	24	33.33%	33.33%	20.83%
	19	6	4	3	31	12	8	83	37.35%	22.89%	14.46%

Breakdowns by outlet

May 2013

Outlet	Fighting Injustic	Seeking Peace/l	Just like you/m	Passive victims	Aggressors	Dysfunctional	Neutral	Tech Coverage	General Covera	Total Coverage	Positive	Negative
AP	2	1	0	0	4	1	1	1	8	9	33.3%	66.7%
CNN	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	4	4	75.0%	25.0%
Economist	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	50.0%	50.0%
NPR	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	50.0%	50.0%
NYT	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	4	5	60.0%	40.0%
WaPo	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	5	6	83.3%	16.7%
WSJ	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	2	0.0%	100.0%

Jan 2015

Outlet	Fighting Injustic	Seeking Peace/l	Just like you/m	Passive victims	Aggressors	Dysfunctional	Neutral	Tech Coverage	General Covera	Total Coverage	Positive	Negative
AP	3	1	1	0	7	2	1	0	15	15	33.3%	66.7%
CNN	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	3	4	50.0%	50.0%
Economist	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	100.0%	0.0%
NPR	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	2	50.0%	50.0%
NYT	1	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	5	5	20.0%	80.0%
WaPo	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	4	4	25.0%	75.0%
WSJ	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	4	4	0.0%	100.0%

August 2016

Outlet	Fighting Injustic	Seeking Peace/l	Just like you/m	Passive victims	Aggressors	Dysfunctional	Neutral	Tech Coverage	General Covera	Total Coverage	Positive	Negative
AP	2	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	7	7	28.6%	71.4%
CNN	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	50.0%	50.0%
Economist	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	2	50.0%	50.0%
NPR	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	5	5	20.0%	80.0%
NYT	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	3	4	25.0%	75.0%
WaPo	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	4	5	60.0%	40.0%
WSJ	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0.0%	100.0%

All Months								Rate of frames used (Top 3)							
Outlet	Fighting Injustic	Seeking Peace/f	Just like you/me	Passive victims	Aggressors	Dysfunctional	Neutral	Outlet	Aggressors	Fighting Injustice	Dysfunctional	Seeking Peace/Problem Solving	Neutral	Just like you/me	Passive victims
AP	7	2	1	0	15	4	2	AP	48.39%	22.58%	12.90%	6.45%	6.45%	3.23%	0.00%
CNN	4	1	1	1	2	0	1	CNN	20.00%	40.00%	0.00%	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%	10.00%
Economist	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	Economist	0.00%	40.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%
NPR	2	1	0	0	1	4	1	NPR	11.11%	22.22%	44.44%	11.11%	11.11%	0.00%	0.00%
NYT	3	1	1	1	5	2	1	NYT	35.71%	21.43%	14.29%	7.14%	7.14%	7.14%	7.14%
WaPo	4	3	2	1	3	1	1	WaPo	20.00%	26.67%	6.67%	20.00%	6.67%	13.33%	6.67%
WSJ	0	0	0	0	6	0	1	WSJ	85.71%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	14.29%	0.00%	0.00%
	22	9	5	3	32	12	8	Total	31.56%	24.70%	14.04%	10.67%	10.81%	4.81%	3.40%

Outlet	Positive Total	Negative Total	Neutral Total	Total
AP	8	21	2	31
CNN	5	4	1	10
Economist	3	1	1	5
NPR	2	6	1	9
NYT	5	8	1	14
WaPo	8	6	1	15
WSJ	0	6	1	7
	34.07%	57.14%	8.79%	100%

Outlet	Tech Coverage	General Coverage	Total Coverage	% of coverage
AP	1	30	31	3.23%
CNN	1	9	10	10.00%
Economist	0	5	5	0.00%
NPR	2	7	9	22.22%
NYT	2	12	14	14.29%
WaPo	2	13	15	13.33%
WSJ	0	7	7	0.00%
Total	8	83	91	8.79%