



Political and Security Lessons from the Arab Spring

Anwor Saeed

PhD. Candidate

Dr. Boumedjout Moulay

Blida University

E-mail: mahiraljabali@gmail.com

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The essay "The Impact on Country Image of the North Africa and Middle East Uprisings," authored by James Pamment in 2011, provides a thorough examination of how the Arab Spring upheavals transformed the international perception of nations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The research published in the journal *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* examines the following critical components:

Commencing in late 2010, the Arab Spring incited political and social turmoil across the Middle East and North Africa. These events attracted significant global attention, shaping international perceptions of the countries in the region.

Pamment's (2011) research examines how these revolutions influenced the efforts of governmental and external actors in public diplomacy and national branding. The key focus of this study was the argument that the upheavals disrupted conventional narratives regarding the region's stability and governance. Countries were portrayed either positively, as exemplars of democratic aspirations, or negatively, as regions of instability and violence.

Pamment (2011) highlights the strategic employment of public diplomacy by domestic governments and international organizations to influence perceptions during and after the uprisings. Social media, particularly platforms like Twitter and Facebook, played a vital role in distributing both true narratives and propaganda.

Pamment's (2011) study aims to examine the discrepancies between the internal perceptions of MENA countries and the external perceptions of these nations. Countries like Tunisia and Egypt received international recognition for their democratic movements, although facing significant challenges domestically.

According to Pamment (2011), the uprisings influenced international relations, prompting global countries to reassess their political and economic ties with the region. Western nations were compelled to balance their backing for democratic movements with their geopolitical interests in the region.



Pamment (2011) asserts that the Arab Spring revealed the malleability of national identities and the increasing importance of strategic communication in shaping global opinions. To effectively navigate the challenges posed by such upheavals, he recommends more efficacious public diplomacy strategies. This study is significant as it aids in understanding the intersection of politics, communication, and international relations, especially in unstable regions like the Middle East.

Philip Seib's *Real-Time Diplomacy: Politics and Power in the Social Media Era* (2012) is a seminal work that examines the transformative impact of social media on diplomacy and power structures in international relations. Seib (2012) contends that social media transforms diplomatic practices by facilitating immediate communication among governments, non-state actors, and citizens, altering the conventional power dynamics, as governments are no longer the exclusive authorities in international dialogue, and enabling marginalized groups to circumvent traditional gatekeepers, such as state-controlled media, to disseminate their narratives worldwide.

Seib (2011) uses the phrase "real-time diplomacy" to illustrate how the immediacy of social media expedites the tempo of international diplomacy. Diplomats, often measured and prudent, are now compelled to respond swiftly to crises, protests, or viral occurrences, frequently without the time for strategic preparation.

Seib (2012) examines the Arab Spring as a pivotal illustration of social media's impact, highlighting how citizens utilized platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to organize rallies, disseminate information, and confront authoritarian governments. Seib asserts that social media has amplified local struggles on a global scale, eliciting reactions from foreign governments and international organizations, while governments grappled with the rapid developments instigated by social media, frequently responding in ways that exposed their unpreparedness for the digital era.

Seib (2012) emphasizes that states are progressively utilizing social media for public diplomacy, seeking to engage directly with international audiences, cultivate favorable narratives regarding their policies and cultures, and fight antagonistic narratives or falsehoods.

Seib (2012), further delineates various obstacles confronting contemporary diplomats, including the erosion of control as governments contend with a multitude of voices on social media, such as activists, journalists, and adversarial entities; the rapid dissemination of misinformation exacerbated by social media accelerates the proliferation of false narratives, complicating diplomatic endeavors to uphold credible accounts, alongside the dichotomy of transparency versus confidentiality, wherein diplomats encounter pressure to enhance online transparency, occasionally conflicting with the necessity for discretion in sensitive negotiations.

Social media has democratized knowledge dissemination, enabling previously marginalized voices to engage in global discourse (Seib, 2012). For Seib (2012), this presents both advantageous and



detrimental consequences: it fosters inclusivity, yet simultaneously permits malicious individuals to disseminate propaganda or provoke violence.

Seib (2012) provides pragmatic recommendations for diplomats and policymakers, emphasizing the necessity for diplomats to receive training in digital tools and strategies for effective engagement with global audiences. He advocates for foreign ministries to integrate social media into their overarching strategic frameworks instead of regarding it as a supplementary tool. Additionally, collaboration with non-state actors, such as NGOs, tech companies, and civil society, can bolster digital diplomacy initiatives. Furthermore, he contends that governments should cultivate the ability to monitor real-time social media trends and respond proactively to emerging crises.

Seib (2012) continues by contemplating the enduring ramifications of social media on diplomacy. He asserts that diplomacy will persist in its evolution alongside advancements in digital technology, with artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and emerging platforms expected to assume an increasingly significant role. Seib contends that the equilibrium between traditional and digital diplomacy will determine the efficacy of governments in maneuvering through the intricacies of the 21st-century global landscape.

Seib's (2012) work is crucial for comprehending the convergence of technology, politics, and diplomacy, the evolving power dynamics among states, non-state actors, and individuals, as well as the problems and opportunities presented by real-time communication in international relations. His approach is especially pertinent for areas such as the Middle East, where social media has exerted significant socio-political effects.

Pamment (2013) examines the media strategy employed by the United States military during the Iraq War in another article titled "American Strategic Communication in Iraq: The 'Rapid Reaction Media Team,'" which was published in the *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*. The article focuses on the formation of the Rapid Reaction Media Team (RRMT) and the objectives it sought to accomplish. The RRMT was established in March 2003 to construct and manage the media system that was headed by the United States in Iraq. Its goal was to establish a public service television network in Iraq that would be "balanced and fair" and provide the Iraqi people with news that was impartial, similar to the BBC or the Public Broadcasting Service.

Even though its declared objective was to operate fairly, the RRMT's budget of \$100 million was taken from the \$87.5 billion budget for the military (Pamment, 2013). The Department of Defence was responsible for ensuring that it was carried out. The network's objective was to deliver objective news, but its connections to military financing and oversight fundamentally conflicted with its position in supporting the objectives of the United States military.

In his explanation, Pamment (2013) notes that the RRMT strategy demonstrates how the media may be utilized as an extension of military operations. According to him, the United States of America employed the infrastructure and content of the media to engage in symbolic violence.



This is analogous to the United States employing military power in the realm of ideas to exert control over how people felt about the conflict.

To demonstrate how difficult it is to employ media projects to achieve political and military objectives, the article draws attention to the inherent difficulties and assumptions that are a part of the RRMT strategy. Even though it is intimately related to the military, Pamment (2013) believes that this demonstrates how difficult it is to establish a media system that is made up of impartial individuals.

The investigation that Pamment (2013) conducted examines, from a critical vantage point, how the media, military policy, and public opinion all interacted with one another throughout the Iraq War. The investigation highlights the challenges and paradoxes that are associated with undertaking such activities.

In another study, "The 'Logics' of Public Diplomacy: In Search of What Unites a Multidisciplinary Research Field," Pamment (2014) offers a theoretical framework that can be utilized to comprehend the numerous practices and motivations that serve as the foundation of public diplomacy (PD). According to Pamment (2014), the motivation behind PD may be attributed to many different foreign policy objectives. These objectives include the necessity of establishing strategic partnerships, securitization, and trade progress.

The fact that various people have varied reasons for practicing PD makes it difficult to build a cohesive theoretical framework for the profession, which is something that he emphasizes a great deal. The article proposes "PD logics," a theoretical framework that may be used to understand and classify the numerous different practices that are associated with public diplomacy.

When it comes to evaluating and comprehending the fundamental strategies and reasoning behind PD projects, these logics can serve as evaluation lenses. Within the scope of the study, Pamment (2014) investigates how the utilization of digital and social media platforms by foreign ministries has influenced public diplomacy methods. He observes that the logics that govern social and digital media have become more internalized into diplomatic practice and that these logics have an impact on modern public diplomacy.

To close the gap that exists between public diplomacy studies and other fields of study, the purpose of Pamment's (2014) essay is to advocate for the creation of a unified theoretical framework for public diplomacy studies. Pamment (2014) advises that academics and practitioners make use of "PD logic" as a means of gaining a better understanding of the complexities and variances that are associated with PD in various settings.

Pamment's (2014) work contributes to the ongoing discussion in the academic community by putting out a theory that not only unifies the subject but also takes into account the variety of public diplomacy. The phrase "PD logics" refers to a framework that provides a methodical approach to



investigating and evaluating the numerous practices and aims that are associated with the profession, particularly in light of the ever-changing digital context.

In yet another study, "Countering Disinformation: The Public Diplomacy Problem of Our Time," Pamment (2018) investigates the growing problem of disinformation in the digital era and the implications that it has for public diplomacy (PD). Pamment (2018) emphasizes the pervasive nature of disinformation, which is exacerbated by digital platforms and contributes to the erosion of public confidence in democratic institutions and information sources.

Because conventional tactics of influence are undercut by the rapid distribution of inaccurate information, the paper emphasizes the importance of PD practitioners adapting to the challenges that are provided by disinformation. Pamment (2014) highlights the need for public diplomacy professionals to have the ability to comprehend and combat the purposeful distortion of information, which has become an essential tool for organizations that want to influence public opinion and undermine democratic regimes.

Pamment (2014) notes that the promotion of media literacy involves encouraging critical thinking and media literacy among the demographics that are being targeted to enable them to differentiate between legitimate information and falsehoods. The process of developing resilient communication methods involves the creation of adaptable communication methods that are capable of effectively addressing and mitigating the consequences, such as disinformation campaigns. To build a unified response to the proliferation of disinformation, it is important to encourage cooperation between governments, civic society, and the business sector.

According to Pamment (2014), the dissemination of false information is a huge obstacle to public diplomacy, necessitating a reevaluation of the methods that can be utilized to maintain confidence and effectively interact with audiences on a global scale. Practitioners of public discourse can more effectively manage the complexities of the information landscape and preserve the integrity of democratic conversation when they put proactive measures into action.

Corneliu Bjola's 2015 publication, *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice*, co-edited with Marcus Holmes, provides an in-depth examination of the impact of digital technology on diplomatic activities. The book characterizes digital diplomacy as a mechanism for change management in international politics, highlighting its transformative effect on conventional diplomatic practices.

Bjola and Holmes (2015) contend that the incorporation of digital tools into diplomacy signifies a substantial transformation, requiring nations to alter their management of international relations. They assert that digital diplomacy is not simply an enhancement of old approaches but a revolutionary force necessitating a reassessment of diplomatic strategies.

The book integrates theoretical frameworks with empirical research to examine the intricacies of digital diplomacy. It analyses the impact of digital platforms on information management, public diplomacy, strategic planning, international negotiations, and crisis management. The volume is



organized to examine both policy ramifications and institutional modifications. It examines the integration of digital tools by foreign ministries, the hurdles encountered, and the tactics implemented to surmount these difficulties. The book presents a comparative analysis of digital diplomatic strategy through numerous case studies from different countries and areas. This method emphasizes the varied applications and results of digital diplomacy globally.

Bjola and Holmes (2015) end by reflecting on the future direction of digital diplomacy, examining possible advancements and the continuous transformation of diplomatic procedures in the digital era. The study is crucial for comprehending the convergence of technology and diplomacy. It offers scholars and practitioners a fundamental framework to understand the complexities introduced by digital tools in international relations. Bjola and Holmes (2015) conceptualize digital diplomacy as change management, providing a perspective on the evolving nature of diplomatic operations in the 21st century.

Ilan Manor's book, "The Digitalization of Public Diplomacy" (2019), contains extensive passages on digital diplomacy by the U.S. about Iran and the Muslim world, the UK about the Syrian Civil War, as well as by Israel and the Palestinians. Taking his cue from some of the above-mentioned writers—Pamment (2013), Melissen (2005), Seib (2012), and Bjola (2015)—Manor (2019) provides a comprehensive synthesis of contemporary scholarship on digital diplomacy.

Manor (2019) is critical of the term 'digital diplomacy' as it seems to him to suggest that the latter is only one among several subsets of diplomacy. He prefers 'digitalization of public diplomacy', as this term better captures the long-term character of the process of digital technologies being adopted by diplomats. In line with previous scholarship, Manor highlights three aspects of this phenomenon. First, it was kicked off by the USA's aim to reach out to the Muslim world in response to the 9/11 attacks. Second, it is embedded in a new media landscape provided by the spread of new ICTs, leading to both the emergence of new and competing public diplomacy actors (NGOs, bloggers, etc.) and the fragmentation of the media audience. Third, it replaces (or, rather, is supposed to replace) one-way communication with a two-way one, in which the audience responds to the diplomatic authors. In line with Pamment, and despite acknowledging the role of non-state diplomatic actors, the book focuses on the digital activities of MFAs and embassies.

Following the hint by Melissen (2005), Manor (2019) emphasizes the embeddedness of diplomats within a digital society, in which gadgets like social media and smartphones enable people to interact over vast geographical differences. This digital society is characterized by networking (as opposed to hierarchies), the importance of information (algorithms and big data), sharing (of one's personal life), and surveillance, i.e., social media users watching each other.

The digitalization of public diplomacy took speed from the late 2000s onwards, when experiments like virtual embassies and Q&A sessions on social media brought home the volatility and sometimes aggressiveness of digital audiences. Manor (2019) identifies a major watershed in the practice of digitalizing public diplomacy in 2014, which was partly a response to the Russian



digital disinformation campaign during the Crimean Crisis. The core element of this watershed was the shift from targeting (of a large audience, say, all citizens of a country) to tailoring (of a specific subset of this audience, say, and the antisemitically inclined section of a country's people). What enabled digital diplomats to reach a very specific audience was the use of algorithms to identify them; thus, the watershed can also be conceptualized as a shift from linear to algorithmic communication. Other elements identified by Manor (2019) are the shifts from digital tactics (issue-based) to digital strategies (campaign-based), from networks of influencers to networked gatekeepers (i.e., social media users at the intersection of two digital networks, say, anti-Semites and football fans), and from a single-issue argument to an all-encompassing narrative.

Manor (2019) then addresses the widespread charge that social media are harmful to democracy because algorithms bring together 'filter bubbles' of like-minded individuals whose digital interaction leads to the mutual strengthening of their opinions and prejudices ('echo chambers'). While Manor (2019) finds this charge exaggerated, he discusses how digital public diplomats are trying to counteract disinformation and echo chambers. Drawing upon the methodology of Bjola and Jiang (2015), Manor (2019) analyzes some cases of public diplomacy done by MFAs (in this case, from Africa and Lithuania) concerning its contents, its ability to set an agenda, and its dialogic character. Concerning the latter, there are still large deficits as communication is largely one-way. While digitalized diplomacy goes a long way in overcoming the limitations of traditional diplomacy, according to Manor (2019), it cannot completely escape the constraints of space and time. As for space, he shows that digital diplomats who are geographically close to their intended audience (in this case, the Palestinian Authority addressing the Israeli public) find it easier to relate to this audience than those who are far away. Furthermore, and in line with Seib's insights on 'real-time diplomacy,' Manor (2019) stresses that digital diplomats need to respond without time lag to events to bring their message effectively across.

The book ends with discussions on how diplomats at the MFAs and embassies create a specific 'i-brand' for their country or, respectively, themselves. The former is dubbed by Manor (2019) as 'selfie diplomacy.' Just as an individual presents themselves on social media, the same is done by countries. Moreover, just like with individuals, the online narrative focuses on successes and righteousness and is ultimately an expression of conformity—the country claims to act in line with universally accepted norms. Nevertheless, the contents of such a national selfie can change over time, as in the changing self-presentation of the USA as multilateral, multicultural, and pro-environmental under Obama to that as the world's prime dealmaker under Trump. Likewise, ambassadors compensate for the loss of decision-making authority, which has been brought about by better communication technologies and thus tighter control by the MFAs over embassies, with the cultivation of their (i-brands). As in the case of the French ambassador in Washington harshly criticizing the USA, such i-brands sometimes have a polemical character and thereby may boost an ambassador's online popularity at the expense of his or her country's larger diplomatic goals.



Given the broadness of the topics discussed by Manor (2019) as well as his extensive engagement with Middle Eastern subjects, his book will guide the research agenda of this thesis. Consequently, some novel areas about the US State Department's response to the Arab Spring, its aftermath, and democracy in the Arab world have arisen for examination. Bearing in mind the historical hostility and divergent perceptions of international issues, the interrogation of the nature of the U.S. i-brand about the Arab Spring and democratic development in the Middle East will thus contribute to the ongoing debate on the nature of diplomacy conducted on social media. Second, available literature has focused on how developed countries, particularly those found in the Western hemisphere, have exploited technology for diplomatic purposes. Yet, little is known about the specifics of these countries' digital diplomatic activities concerning critical areas highlighted by Manor (2019). For instance, certain gaps in the literature on the Middle East exist. This includes the need to interrogate whether US social media messages are tailored or targeted, the nature of the narrative presented about US policies on Middle East democratization, what these messages are aimed at, how U.S. digital diplomats deal with anti-American echo chambers, and whether U.S. digital diplomacy is merely a monologue or is it dialogic. This study will also attempt to fill this gap.