

MIFTAH's Digital Diplomacy in the Struggle of Palestinian Women

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Abstract

The Israeli occupation of Palestine has caused significant suffering for women. The government's of Palestine efforts to address this issue have been carried out by initiating a National Action Plan, which is an adoption of WPS UNSCR 1325. The government's efforts, which are perceived as unsuccessful, have led to the emergence of several non- governmental organizations, such as MIFTAH (*The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy*). The purpose of this study is to examine MIFTAH's efforts to fight for Palestinian women using digital diplomacy. This research employs a descriptive qualitative design. Primary data were collected from MIFTAH's official website, Twitter (X), and Instagram accounts, while secondary data were obtained from books, academic journals, and annual reports. Data collection was conducted through library research, using digital diplomacy as an analytical tool to examine MIFTAH's efforts in advocating for Palestinian women. The results show that MIFTAH's advocacy through social media has been carried out, although it still faces various problems, including technological limitations, disinformation caused by Western propaganda or *hasbara*, and dependence on digital media trends that are temporary and unsustainable. Nevertheless, MIFTAH's digital efforts continue to make an important contribution to the struggle for Palestinian women. MIFTAH's digital diplomacy is a relevant alternative for Palestine.

Keywords: *Digital Diplomacy, MIFTAH, Palestine, Women*

INTRODUCTION

Israel's prolonged occupation and military aggression against Palestinian territory have had a profound and far-reaching impact on civilians, especially women and children. In conflict situations, women and children are vulnerable groups who not only face the threat of physical violence, but also sexual violence, double roles, and psychological pressure. The position of Palestinian women, who occupy a "*second position*" in a society shaped by culture and tradition, makes their position even more disadvantageous in conflict situations.

According to the United Nations Palestinian Rights Committee (UNISPAL) at 2023 report on the Israeli-Hamas retaliatory attacks in 2023, at least 493,000 women and girls were forced to flee their homes and became *internally displaced persons* (IDPs), forcing them to live in refugee camps. In addition, around 900 women had to take on dual roles after the death of the head of their family, which also meant an increase in the number of children without both parents. In this situation, women had to take over the responsibilities of the head of the family who was killed in the conflict, increasing the social and economic burden that women had to bear. In addition, UN Women

The Report of The Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, on the report at the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council revealed that since the Israeli attack on October 7, 2023 there has been significant harm to women and children, both physically and mentally. Israel has deliberately targeted women and children, and health facilities providing sexual and reproductive services have been systematically

destroyed throughout Gaza, including maternity hospitals and the main in vitro fertility clinic in Gaza. Israel has used gender-based sexual violence in detention, leading the UNISPAI investigation commission to reveal that Israel uses sexual violence, reproductive violence, and other forms of gender-based violence as threats against Palestinian women and children.

In response to the worsening conditions, the Palestinian National Authority has taken steps to minimize the impact of the conflict on women. Palestine's concrete efforts began with the initiation of the *National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)*, which was adopted as a result of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which aims to emphasize the importance of protecting women's rights in conflict and encouraging women to participate in the *peacebuilding* process. The implementation of the NAP WPS was developed jointly by the *Ministry of Women's Affairs* and the *Higher National Committee (HNC)* and supported by *UN Women* and donor countries such as Norway. The Palestinian NAP WPS covers four pillars, namely: (1) Prevention & Protection, (2) Accountability, (3) Participation, and (4) Post-conflict Recovery and Assistance.

In the process of drafting and implementing the NAP WPS, the Palestinian government collaborated with various actors such as *Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)*, *International Organizations*, and academic and activist groups. To achieve the objectives of the NAP WPS, the government collaborated with various actors, one of which was MIFTAH (*The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy*), an independent non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Palestine. MIFTAH was founded in December 1998, with Hanan Ashrawi as its first Secretary General. MIFTAH aims to be a Palestinian platform for global dialogue and cooperation based on the principles of democracy, human rights, and gender equality through advocacy, collaboration, and diplomacy.

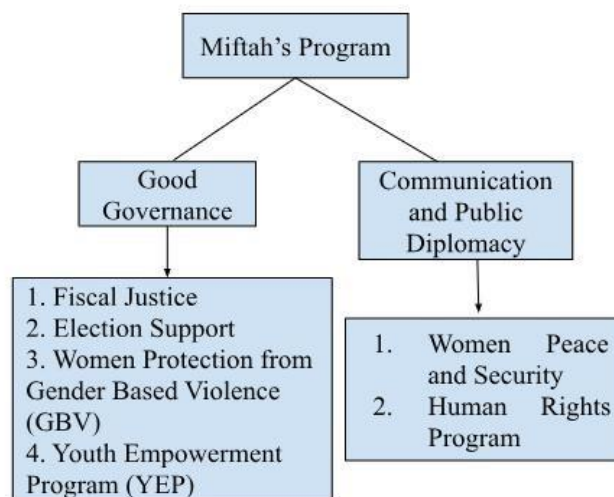


Figure 1 MIFTAH's Programs

(Source: compiled by the Author)

This study focuses on discussing MIFTAH's programs in the field of *Communication and Public Diplomacy*, particularly initiatives related to the *women, peace and security* agenda, which is also MIFTAH's priority program. Public diplomacy has become one of the main instruments in the Palestinian struggle. Public diplomacy is a form of diplomacy that can be carried out by states or non-state actors with the aim of influencing public opinion. MIFTAH uses public diplomacy as a means to counter pro-Israel narratives, often known as *hasbara* (Israeli propaganda), through dialogue with international countries and participation in global forums.

Along with technological developments, diplomatic techniques have also evolved. In the

2000s, a new form of diplomacy emerged, known as digital diplomacy, which facilitates the delivery of messages and shapes or influences public opinion. MIFTAH not only uses conventional methods, but also utilizes digital space. Referring to a statement by Zaid Am-Ali, *Director of Public Discourse and Communication Program* at MIFTAH, in his interview with Jerusalem24 fm (a Palestinian radio station), he stated that digital diplomacy is a very relevant tool because it can reach more policymakers, officials, and the public. However, he also said that Palestinian digital diplomacy still lags behind Israel's efforts. According to Zaid Am-Ali, Israel is far more advanced in digital diplomacy, both in terms of academics, research, and practical implementation. He also stated that at MIFTAH, planning and strategies for utilizing digital diplomacy are being studied.

The transformation from conventional diplomacy to digital diplomacy has opened up opportunities for non-state actors to engage in shaping or influencing the wider community. In this context, MIFTAH not only acts as an advocacy actor but is also part of a social community that seeks to influence international public opinion through digital media.

However, there is still a gap in academic studies that examine the effectiveness of digital diplomacy efforts carried out by non-state actors, especially in the context of the Palestinian women's struggle. So far, research on MIFTAH has been very limited, and discussions are often confined to its role in policy formulation any reason why this is so?. There is still no research that specifically discusses how MIFTAH is involved in the Palestinian women's struggle by utilizing digital diplomacy. This is important to examine to see whether *non-state* actors can play a role in diplomacy.

Based on the above description, we interested in examining MIFTAH's digital diplomacy efforts in fighting for the rights of Palestinian women in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

METHOD

Digital diplomacy is a new dimension of public diplomacy, where the diplomatic process has traditionally been carried out by diplomats in the negotiation process. The development of communication technology and the internet has made diplomatic media/tools more accessible to all circles. Social media has become a platform that is synergistically used to achieve national goals/interests.

Digital diplomacy, also known as *e-diplomacy*, is one component of electronic public diplomacy. According to [1] public diplomacy is carried out through the exchange of arts and culture, education, advocacy, and international broadcasting efforts. The development of the digital era has not changed the content of the conventional public diplomacy process, but rather expanded the diplomacy process to be more extensive.

The objectives of digital diplomacy are different from those of public diplomacy, although many sources mention that digital diplomacy is a development of public diplomacy. Some also mention that the digitization of public diplomacy has become digital diplomacy.

To understand digital diplomacy, we can first look at how actors use to promote certain issues in order to demonstrate their ideals/goals and convey messages to their counterparts. Second, digital diplomacy is related to the ability to access information as a source of diplomacy. Third, digital diplomacy is related to activities in analyzing international relations issues [1]. Meanwhile, Juan Luis Manfredi views Digital Diplomacy as the art of representing, negotiating, protecting, and shaping the development of a country's interests with third parties based on the Vienna Convention on diplomatic relations. Meanwhile, Rafael Rubio explains, based on Manfredi's definition, that digital diplomacy is the development of public diplomacy using digital tools with a broader scope of activities, actors, and opportunities [2].

Table 1. Shifting Diplomacy from Traditional to Digital

Aspect	Traditional Diplomacy	Digital Diplomacy (Social Media)
Communication Channels	Formal, state-to-state interactions through diplomatic channels, traditional media	Instantaneous, public interactions via platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram
Engagement with Public	Limited direct engagement; relies on traditional media and official statements	Direct engagement with global audiences; real-time interaction and feedback
Influence on State Behavior	Slow to adapt; decisions often based on formal negotiations and reports	Rapid response to public opinion; policies may shift based on online feedback
Public Diplomacy	Promoted through official channels and cultural diplomacy	Promoted through social media campaigns, hashtags, and viral content
Information Dissemination	Controlled and often slow; information passes through multiple layers	Fast and widespread; direct dissemination and potential for viral spread
Risks and Challenges	Limited to diplomatic protocols and traditional media constraints	High risk of misinformation, disinformation, cyber attacks, and reputation management issues
Agenda-Setting	Influenced by traditional media and diplomatic priorities	Platforms set and shift agendas; issues can gain global attention rapidly through viral content
Examples	Traditional diplomacy channels such as embassies, consulates, and official state media	Case studies include Arab Spring, #MeToo movement, and digital campaigns by various states

(Source:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383847664_Digital_Diplomacy_How_Social_Media_Influences_International_Relations_in_the_21st_Century)

To understand the shift from traditional diplomacy to digital diplomacy, we can look at several aspects: changes in diplomatic actors, where countries are no longer the main actors and have been replaced by non-state actors and individuals; instant diplomacy, which utilizes social media; public engagement in interactions, where audience response is crucial to the success of the diplomatic process, which is not the case in public diplomacy. However, digital diplomacy also faces the risk of disinformation and misinformation due to the speed at which news spreads on social media without any filtering or issue management. Cyber attacks have also become a widespread problem in recent times.

According to Sotiriu's view in a journal written by Adesina [3], digital diplomacy sees several things differently from the way traditional diplomacy works. In the traditional diplomacy approach, the emphasis is usually on special meetings attended by designated actors, so not many parties are involved in policy-making. However, digital diplomacy provides opportunities for participation and possibilities in foreign policy-making. Second, digital diplomacy can open up

opportunities to introduce countries to the world. Third, digital diplomacy can serve as a bridge and distribute opinions among young people. Fourth, digital diplomacy will provide opportunities for representatives, in this case diplomats, to increase their popularity in conveying the policies of their home countries [3]. Unlike public diplomacy, digital diplomacy is carried out with the aim of improving relations between countries, bringing audiences closer together, enabling fast and effective communication, providing affordable technology, and advancing small countries. In addition, digital diplomacy also has several factors that must be addressed in its implementation, including internet and social media freedom, limited knowledge about the use of the internet and social media, debates between the government as decision makers and other actors, where there is no longer any secrecy in the delivery of information, the emergence of a culture of anonymity that makes the flow of information so fast, even for hoaxes, and hacking is also a major enemy of digital diplomacy.

Bjola and Holmes argue that digital diplomacy can be described based on its policy level [1]. This can be seen in the impact of social media on how state representatives can carry out their work and make policies. With digital diplomacy, there will be several changes in the way information is gathered, how negotiations are conducted, responses are made, and future diplomatic practices. Thus, representatives or diplomats will be able to evaluate and predict what will happen in international relations in the future.

Based on this view, digital diplomacy will not fade away, as Holmes argues that digital diplomacy will continue to exist and be used by representatives while still considering *the costs and advantages* [4]. The explanation of digital diplomacy will lead to this study by looking at how representatives can utilize technology and information through the internet to conduct *nation branding*. The Covid-19 pandemic has become a lesson in the importance of digital international relations when everyone around the world is isolated. Governments, international organizations, and health agencies are implementing digital technology not only to facilitate planning, testing and surveillance, and clinical management, but also community engagement and international relations. These authoritative international institutions increasingly relied on digital *platforms* to share guidelines, messages, and health information updates with the public, as well as to coordinate the global response to the pandemic, virtual meetings, negotiations, and international collaboration. The public used digital devices for remote work. Digital *platforms* became channels for expressing global solidarity, sharing experiences, and supporting one another. Digital activism, such as digital diplomacy, plays a role in advocating for the equitable distribution of vaccines, challenging policies, and combating misinformation, false or misleading information about the virus, treatments, and vaccines. This shift underscores the importance of digital technology in maintaining diplomatic relations, connecting with the public, and conducting international affairs in times of crisis.

Digital diplomacy refers to the use of digital tools and technologies as well as *online platforms*, in the form of various social media (such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram), *websites*, blogs, and other *online* channels, primarily by governments and diplomatic entities [1]. The digitization of public diplomacy also poses a challenge for diplomats to compete online with journalists, bloggers, foreign social media, NGOs, activists, and NGOs.

The development of digital diplomacy is practiced by all actors in which systems? , no longer prioritizing the state (diplomats) as a means of achieving national interests. Although there are still situations where the state wants diplomats to play a more dominant role, and information must go through bureaucratic stages, which actually slows down the dissemination of emergency information to the public.

The development of digital diplomacy cannot be separated from the existence of the digital community. This society has developed with several identifying characteristics: distance and remoteness, tolerance for the risks of information dissemination, a separation between online and offline communication, and the delivery of messages in digital diplomacy requiring feedback from the message recipients in the form of likes, comments, and subscriptions. Ultimately,

however, digital diplomacy is determined by social media algorithms that cannot be controlled by state and non-state actors [5].

Although still a subject of debate, the implementation of Digital Diplomacy is highly dependent on several factors: first, the speed and development/spread of issues; second, the environment of Digital Diplomacy, Cyber Agenda, Cyber Governance, internet freedom, Cyber Weapons, and Cyber Security, third: Internet usage, Knowledge Management, fourth: Digitalization. Although the objectives of Digital Diplomacy are very different from those of Public Diplomacy, Digital Diplomacy is largely determined by who the actors in the Diplomacy are. The actors involved can range from non-governmental organizations, mass organizations, activists, bloggers, to terrorist groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Digital Diplomacy Efforts MIFTAH

Before the emergence of digital diplomacy, the struggle of Palestinian women was largely conducted through traditional forms of activism, emphasizing collective action, community mobilization, and face-to-face advocacy. Communication of their narratives and demands was primarily limited to local and regional stakeholders, making it difficult to reach global audiences or international institutions. The rise of digital diplomacy, however, transformed this dynamic by enabling organizations such as MIFTAH to amplify Palestinian women's voices through digital platforms, social media campaigns, and online publications.

MIFTAH's adoption of digital diplomacy stems from the organization's need to overcome geopolitical barriers and enhance global visibility for women's issues under occupation. The organization and its members primarily access technology through open-source digital tools, social media networks, and international NGO partnerships that provide training, technical resources, and online advocacy frameworks. For non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like MIFTAH, digital diplomacy serves as a strategic instrument that not only facilitates advocacy and transnational networking but also strengthens audience engagement, public outreach, and fundraising capabilities.

In this context, MIFTAH's digital diplomacy bridges the gap between local struggles and global awareness, allowing Palestinian women's voices to be recognized within broader international conversations on human rights, gender equality, and social justice.

The implementation of the NAP WPS is one clear example of Palestinian women's struggles. It involved collective efforts between the government and the National Coalition, which consisted of interest groups, civil society organizations, and other non-governmental institutions. From 1929 to 1947, Palestinian women were involved in the national struggle alongside men by participating in demonstrations, congresses, memoranda, weapons smuggling, fundraising, etc. One of them was Michelin Awwad, a Palestinian woman who threw stones at Israeli soldiers during the first intifada (1980s) [6].

The struggle of Palestinian women by MIFTAH shows that non-state actors can also play a role in diplomacy. According to Dr. Anwarul Wadud on his research "Non-State Actors in Diplomacy" CSOs are actors that have a significant impact on diplomacy. Their movements, which utilize aspects of *social movements*, *advocacy networks*, and *lone activists*, influence policymakers, and these movements are important for diplomatic outcomes. Furthermore, he also argues that CSOs can influence the international agenda by attracting the attention of the international community [7]. Thus, in diplomacy, CSOs such as MIFTAH also have a significant role and can influence the international community perhaps indicate what kind of influence does MIFTAH desire.

MIFTAH plays an important role in expanding the narrative or perspective of Palestinian women through digital media. Through its official website, social media, digital publications, and participation in online international forums, MIFTAH actively voices issues of gender equality,

human rights violations, and the protection of women in conflict. This strategy positions MIFTAH as a bridge between the local reality of Palestinian women and the international community.

MIFTAH uses its official website as its main platform. On its official website, MIFTAH focuses on publishing information about human rights violations against Palestinians, especially women, in the form of *fact sheets*, policy analyses, evaluation results, and program reports. These publications are used as a means of public diplomacy using digital technology to reach the international community.

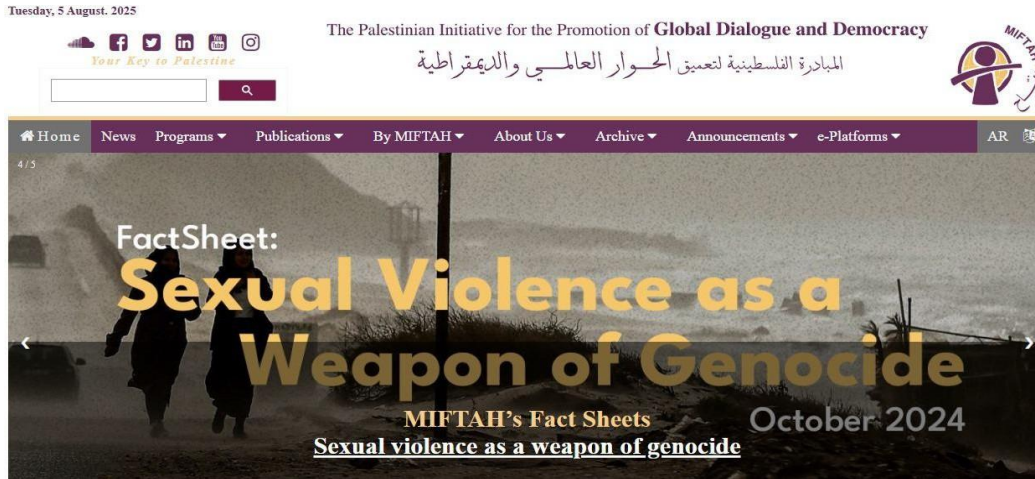


Figure 2. MIFTAH's Official Website
 (source: <https://www.MIFTAH.org/>)

In addition to its official website, social media is also a key tool for MIFTAH in advocating for the rights of Palestinian women. Social media platforms such as Twitter (now known as X), Instagram, Facebook, and others are utilized. Twitter diplomacy (now known as X diplomacy) has become an important instrument in MIFTAH's diplomacy. Since its establishment in 2006, Twitter has played a role in diplomatic functions, including communication with local and international communities, and has been used as an instrument of soft power in achieving national in.



Figure 3. MIFTAH's statement on UN Resolution of Status of Palestinian Women on X
 (source: <https://x.com/MIFTAHpal/status/>)

MIFTAH uses social media such as X (formerly known as Twitter) to influence the

international community to pay attention to this issue and also intends to counter pro-Israel narratives. MIFTAH also actively condemns Israel's actions and seeks to collaborate with international organizations such as the UN to stop Israel's actions. MIFTAH also uses social media as an information channel to publish conditions on the ground, enabling the international community to obtain an accurate picture of the conflict situation in Palestine [8].

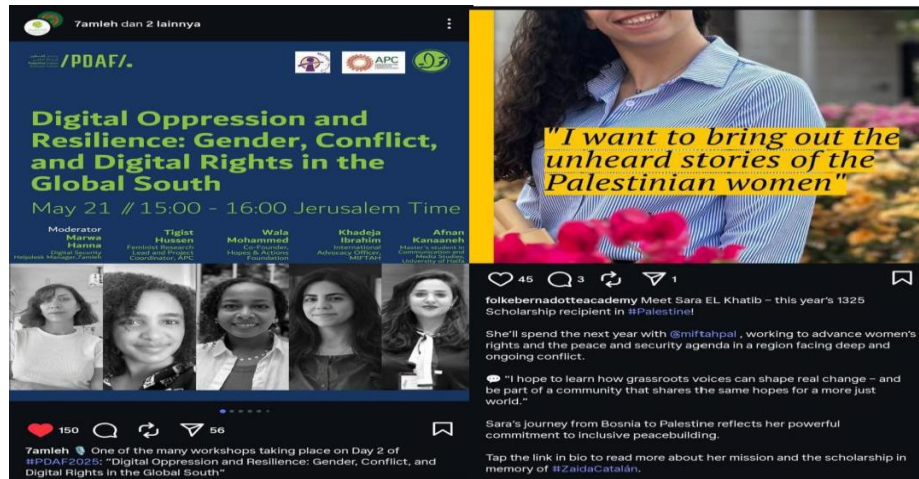


Figure 4. MIFTAH Promotes Scholarship and Webinar to empowering women on Instagram

(source: <https://www.instagram.com/MIFTAHpal>)

In addition to advocacy, MIFTAH also collaborates with other communities/CSOs in the field of education to empower women. MIFTAH utilizes digital media such as Instagram to disseminate information about webinars and scholarships to build the capacity of women in Palestine.

Palestinians experience limited access to social media. Since 2023, Meta Platforms, Inc., the social media company that owns Facebook and Instagram, has deleted more than 90,000 pieces of content and automatically blocked tens of millions of posts related to Palestine [9]. In addition, there is a technological imbalance that has caused Palestine's digital struggle to lag behind Israel. At the Geneva Internet Platform 2025, Khadeja Ibrahim (representative of MIFTAH) revealed that Palestinians still use 3G networks, while Israelis in the West Bank already use 4G and 5G networks. She also said that AI (artificial intelligence) technologies such as Blue Wolf, Lavender, and Where's Daddy, as well as pro-Israel policies on social media such as Meta, limit the Palestinian civil society's access to technology and digital communication. To address these challenges, MIFTAH is urgently needed as an advocacy organization that serves as a bridge between civil society and the international community.

B. The Role of NGOs and the Role of the State in Digital Diplomacy

Previously, public diplomacy was only carried out by diplomatic representatives or official representatives of the state. Cooperation is key to increasing stability and therefore he views the growing "new diplomacy" as an effort to establish relationships and interactions with actors other than the state. However, according to him, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of which country? must be responsible for explaining what is happening in the world and what the state should do as *feedback* [5]. Indirectly, he understands that in implementing this new style of diplomacy, government control through diplomats is necessary to provide an understanding of national interests.

Ilan Manor understands that digital diplomacy carried out by NGOs aims to influence the

diplomatic process [5]. Manor emphasizes that the state remains the main actor in the diplomatic process, but NGOs and other non-state actors play an important role in supporting the diplomatic process. Diplomats are also encouraged to adapt to digital diplomacy so that national interests can be more easily achieved through diplomatic channels. The digitization of public diplomacy has brought diplomats and the press closer together, but non-state actors cannot fully replace the role of diplomats.

Miftah's efforts through digital diplomacy cannot be said to have been completely successful, but with digital diplomacy, MIFTAH has succeeded in increasing international visibility on the Palestinian issue and becoming *a counter narrative* to the disinformation or propaganda spread by Western or Israeli media.

The results of this research discussion show that although MIFTAH has the capability to shape public narratives, it cannot effectively carry out diplomatic tasks. However, MIFTAH serves as a bridge that maximizes the diplomacy carried out by diplomats for the benefit of the country. Thus, the relationship between the state and NGOs in digital public diplomacy can be seen as complementary, with the state holding the formal mandate, while NGOs such as MIFTAH expand their sphere of influence in the non-formal and cross-border realm.

The author recognizes that this research presents several challenges, including limited data accessibility and the lack of in-depth studies on the organization's initiatives. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict further restricts MIFTAH's ability to generate and share digital content, resulting in a shortage of materials available for analysis. Moreover, digital diplomacy itself faces inherent limitations, such as inconsistency in practice, a tendency to become a temporary trend, and the persistent technology gap, all of which hinder its long-term effectiveness and equitable implementation. Therefore, further research is needed to better understand the progress, sustainability, and impact of MIFTAH's advocacy efforts. This study, however, focuses specifically on MIFTAH's digital diplomacy in advancing women's rights, rather than encompassing all dimensions of the organization's work.

CONCLUSION

The advancement of diplomacy through digitalization has blurred the boundaries of traditional diplomacy. Non-state actors such as CSOs and other civil communities can diminish the functional role of official state representatives such as diplomats. In the case of MIFTAH, this dynamic does not entirely diminish the role of official state representatives, but rather complements and expands the diplomatic landscape. MIFTAH operates within the realm of public and digital diplomacy, using online platforms to amplify Palestinian voices, promote women's rights, and influence international opinion. While traditional diplomats continue to represent the formal political agenda of the Palestinian state, MIFTAH's digital advocacy bridges the gap between grassroots narratives and global policymaking arenas, thereby enhancing rather than replacing formal diplomatic efforts.

However, to date, studies on the precise definition and boundaries of digital diplomacy remain unclear. This has led to *overlapping* roles among actors in digital diplomacy. This study is a new development in the field of diplomacy studies and is urgently needed to map out a precise definition and establish boundaries, so it must be further developed.

In the context of MIFTAH's efforts in the Palestinian women's struggle, MIFTAH plays a major role in advocacy and women's empowerment. MIFTAH's digital diplomacy is carried out through social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as instruments to gather international support and as tools to counter pro-Israel media. In addition, MIFTAH also uses their official website to publish *policy briefs* and *fact sheets*. MIFTAH also uses digital space as a place for virtual discussion/negotiation.

In practice, MIFTAH also collaborates with international organizations, CSOs, NGOs, and other donor agencies, such as the European Union Norway, Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC), Palestine National Coalition, and others. Partnerships between these

institutions help MIFTAH in conducting digital diplomacy to encourage MIFTAH to access global platforms and draw international attention to Palestinian women's issues.

In the context of MIFTAH's efforts to fight for the rights and independence of Palestinian women, digital diplomacy is a strategic step that is in line with the accountability pillar of the Palestinian *National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security* (NAP WPS). This pillar emphasizes the importance of accountability mechanisms for the Israeli occupation by putting pressure on the international community and organizations to promote Israel's legal accountability. However, digital diplomacy often faces challenges in the form of inconsistency and a tendency to become merely a passing trend, so its long-term effectiveness is still debatable. In addition, the technology gap is also an obstacle to the effective implementation of digital diplomacy.

Based on the above analysis, there are a number of recommendations that can be given to MIFTAH, the Palestinian government, and *digital society*. First, MIFTAH needs to strengthen its diplomatic strategy and continue to develop technology to counter Israeli propaganda and pro-Israel media. In addition, MIFTAH also needs to involve strategic partners by establishing cooperation to empower women.

Second, the Palestinian government, as a stakeholder, needs to be active in observing the situation and supporting digital diplomacy that supports Palestinian interests. MIFTAH, as a CSO engaged in advocacy, must be given the freedom to carry out its functions.

Third, the digital society, which acts as the communicant (the party receiving the message) in digital diplomacy, needs to actively participate in responding to the digital diplomacy carried out by MIFTAH. This response can take the form of likes, comments, and shares on digital media and hashtags to call for support for Palestinian women.

Thus, MIFTAH's efforts to fight for Palestinian women must be in synergy with the government and the digital community so that MIFTAH's goals, namely to construct a global idea about Israel in the conflict, empower women who are a vulnerable category in the conflict, and obtain international support, both diplomatically and financially (donors), through digital diplomacy instruments, can be successful.

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