to all participants that the precondition for success was to come up with well-defined and operational plans that will be placed on the negotiation table once the synchronous processes start.

In many ways, cyber exchanges of policy formation were a sort of relatively low-speed pilot run before the two rounds of world politics. They included flexible, asynchronous sessions within Facebook groups. Simply put, each player joined the group at different times and posted a comment that was later addressed when others read it and reacted. So the intensity of interactions at this stage depended on each participant’s time allocation, motivation, and actual availability in terms of time zones across the global village. The policy formation process also served as a training period for individuals who were less familiar or comfortable with Facebook procedures and allowed each team to create its collective identity based on the personal traits of each participant, accounting for creativity, leadership, negotiation skills, and decision-making abilities.

During this early simulation stage, the media teams carried out Skype video sessions to coordinate their coverage responsibilities and to build their media strategies. These exchanges provided individuals who played media professionals with encounters online as surrogate for face-to-face encounters. They also facilitated some coaching needed for players who were in the media team but were not familiar with media theories or actual conduct techniques.

Within the Iranian team, debates took place on how to cope with the Nuclear Free Gulf initiative and all the while continue at full speed with the nuclear buildup. The team had to discuss the issue of continued support for Hamas, especially given Palestinian aid to the rebels in Syria. Another core topic was how to manage the growing pressure of the sanctions imposed by the Western powers.

Within the American team the question of an active U.S. role in the region and its specifics were debated and the measures necessary to make the United States an effective mediator were considered. In the Israel and Palestinian teams core national interests and redlines were defined. At the same time, the alternatives open to negotiation and compromise were weighed. The Israeli team had to cope simultaneously with two adversaries, Iran and the Palestinians, in two overlapping conflicts, to safeguard American support, and to stabilize a region in which Fatah and Hamas had reached a reconciliation agreement and dangerous radical forces were operating all around Israel.

At the end of the policy formation process, we posted an announcement about the upcoming synchronous world politics encounter on Facebook to remind players they should get ready for intensive synchronous negotiations. Clearly, the most exciting part of the Middle East simulation was about to begin. Some teams even set up a short Facebook meeting before the synchronous run, to coordinate strategy and make last-minute arrangements.

Creating an authentic atmosphere on cyber simulations is important, just as it is in face-to-face ones. To transform the social network into a stage for the regional conflict, the team members used national emblems and flags to decorate their group wall and changed their personal profile photo to those of the leaders they played for the two hours of synchronous interactions. This way all participants were always recognized by their real name but were also visually connected to the character they represented. The atmosphere was further enhanced by ethnocentric rhetoric typical to the characters and orientations of each actor.

By contrast, during the Gulf nuclear simulation, the policy formation process was brief as it often occurs due to time constraints in face-to-face simulations. The teamwork was usually confined to class time, and beyond that few discussions took place. When world politics began, teammates split into distinctive working groups, and the intense and accelerated pace of international negotiations pushed domestic politics aside.