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# The Israeli Conflict System

Analytic approaches

Edited by  
Harvey Starr and Stanley Dubinsky



# The Israeli Conflict System

The Middle East conflict system is perhaps the world's most important and intractable problem area, whose developments carry global consequences. An effective investigation of the context and change in the region calls for a melding of academic approaches, methods, and findings with policy-oriented needs.

*The Israeli Conflict System* brings together leading conflict scholars primarily from political science, applying a range of advanced, rigorous analytic and data-gathering techniques to address this single empirical domain – the contemporary Israeli Conflict System. Recognising the causal complexity of this conflict system, the volume's central theme is that the system's current conditions are best understood in their broader temporal/historic, cultural/linguistic, and spatial/geographic contexts. Through the lens of economic, geographic, historical, linguistic, and political analyses, and the application of data analysis, experiments, simulations, and models of rational choice, this volume shows how diverse disciplinary perspectives and methodologies can complement each other effectively. In this way, its chapters provide a model for the integration of factors and contexts necessary for understanding contemporary world politics, and a sampling of theories, approaches, and methods that are applicable, useful, or valid under different conditions.

This book offers a cutting-edge resource for scholars and students of Political Science, International Relations, Conflict Studies, and Middle East Studies.

**Harvey Starr** is the Dag Hammarskjöld Professor in International Affairs Emeritus at the University of South Carolina, with expertise in the study of conflict, geopolitics, IR theory. He is the author or co-author of 18 books and monographs, and almost 100 articles and chapters.

**Stanley Dubinsky** is Professor of Linguistics at the University of South Carolina, with expertise in syntactic and semantics. He has published 2 books, 3 edited volumes, and 55 articles and chapters on various languages, including English, Japanese, Korean, Hebrew, and Bantu languages.

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*Harvey Starr and Stanley Dubinsky*

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**To our families, who have supported us in all we do.**

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# Contributors

**Katherine Barbieri**

Department of Political Science, University of South Carolina

**Belinda Bragg**

NSI Inc.

**Bruce Bueno de Mesquita**

Department of Politics, New York University

**William D. Davies**

Linguistics Department, University of Iowa

**Stanley Dubinsky**

Linguistics Program, University of South Carolina

**Nehemia Geva**

Department of Political Science, Texas A&M University

**Nadia Jilani-Hyler**

Department of Political Science, Georgia Regents University

**Ranan D. Kuperman**

Division of International Relations, School of Political Sciences, University of Haifa

**Adrian R. Lewis**

Department of History, University of Kansas

**Roger Chi-Feng Liu**

Department of Political Science, University of South Carolina

**Zeev Maoz**

Department of Political Science, University of California, Davis

**Ashley Murph-Schwarzer**

Department of Political Science, University of South Carolina

**Andreas Musolff**

Language and Communication Studies, University of East Anglia

**Dona Roy**

Independent Scholar

**Belgin San-Akca**

Department of International Relations, Koç University [Istanbul, Turkey]

**Philip A. Schrodtt**

Parus Analytics

**Matthew Shaffer**

Department of Political Science, University of South Carolina

**Alastair Smith**

Department of Politics, New York University

**Harvey Starr**

Department of Political Science, University of South Carolina

**G. Dale Thomas**

LGA Trading, Inc.

**Brian Warby**

Department of Political Science, University of Northern Iowa

**Ömür Yılmaz**

Gender and Minorities Institute [Nicosia, Cyprus]

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# 1 Introduction

## Crossing disciplinary and methodological boundaries in conflict systems analysis

*Harvey Starr and Stanley Dubinsky*

It goes without saying that the Middle East conflict system is one of the world's most important and intractable problem areas, with consequences that ripple across the global system. And, at a time when academics in political science have been advocating multi-method approaches to research and the bringing together of basic research and policy-oriented research, the editors held a three-day conference which brought together conflict scholars, primarily from political science, applying a range of advanced, rigorous analytic, and data-gathering techniques, to address *the single empirical domain* of the contemporary Middle East conflict system (primarily focusing on Israel's internal and external conflicts). Comparing the application of multiple methods and formalisms to a single data domain has been used to good effect in other social science research, such as linguistics, and we foresee a similar advantage in this project. As Davies and Dubinsky (2004, vii) note:

Through a close examination of the [implementation] of analyses of [a singular] data domain, one may gain insights into the interaction between data and theory. [This approach can sometimes] dramatically illustrate how . . . models . . . drive the perception of data, and how . . . facts at other times force the restructuring of . . . models, [leading to a better] understanding of the phenomena themselves and how data drive analyses and analyses are driven by theory.

We see this volume as a significant component in the melding of academic approaches, methods, and findings with policy-oriented needs. The approaches and methods illustrated in the chapters to follow have been organized so that the investigation of the Israeli Conflict System develops cumulatively. In the same spirit as the National Science Foundation's (NSF) program in Empirical Implications of Theoretical Models (EITM) approach to research, this volume wishes not only to demonstrate the complementarity between formal approaches and various empirical methods, but the ways in which a wide variety of more recent and sophisticated methods can complement each other, as well as more qualitatively based approaches dealing with issues of identity, and help produce a convergence of findings and analyses. Not only does work of the political scientists draw from



other disciplines, but several other disciplines will be explicitly represented – for example, sociology in regard to network analysis, geography in regard to the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) techniques and role of spatiality, and several disciplines in regard to constructivist-oriented approaches that focus on identity-based analyses to social conflict such as geography, linguistics, and anthropology.

In addition, these chapters cross levels of analysis for a fuller integration of domestic (internal) and international (external) factors and contexts – a necessary component for the understanding of contemporary world politics. Starr (2006, 1) has written about the importance and the need for political scientists to engage in “crossing boundaries” in the design, execution, and presentation of their research:

In my view, scholars – not only in international relations but across the sub-fields of political science – have pursued research more fruitfully when their theory and research designs ‘cross boundaries’ of various kinds. Boundaries can indicate the limits of some set of phenomena; such simplification and specification can be valuable in the development of theory, concepts, and research design. However, boundaries too often loom as *barriers*, which can hinder how we think about phenomena, how we theorize about phenomena, and how we study the world about us. As scholars we must be conscious of artificial boundaries or barriers that constrain our thinking, and be just as conscious of finding ways to promote fertile theory and effective research design. In this sense we should think of the crossing boundaries approach *not* as some new theory or theoretical approach, but rather as a synthesizing device that helps us in organizing theory and research.

Many of these boundary-crossing activities also relate to continuing discussions concerning the differences between *qualitative* and *quantitative* research, in the sense of recognizing the *causal complexity* that exists in many areas of study. The complexities of the Israeli Conflict System call out for the entire range of analytic techniques that cross boundaries between International Relations and Comparative Politics, as well as the focus on both small-*n* and large-*n* designs – analyses of necessary and sufficient conditions, process tracing, patterns revealed by time series analyses, baselines of patterns of behavior or conditions against which to compare specific cases or situations, and the control that can be imposed by both standard and more advanced statistical techniques. The investigation of a causally complex system as well as a set of conflict *processes* requires that we investigate how they can (in combination) contribute to the basic and applied questions that have been raised in the study of Middle East conflict.

Thus, the chapters included here reflect the melding of academic approaches, methods, and findings, with policy-oriented needs. They provide both methodological and substantive contributions in a number of areas: (i) the crossing of multiple boundaries, such as the use of multi-method approaches to research; (ii) the melding of qualitative and quantitative research, in the sense of recognizing the causal complexity that exists in many areas of study; (iii) the use of

research, theory, and findings across the sub-disciplines of political science as well as across the social sciences; (iv) crossing levels of analysis for a fuller integration of domestic (internal) and international (external) factors and contexts; (v) and bringing research findings to bear on policy analysis.<sup>1</sup>

The chapters in this volume are interconnected by a set of themes that *emerged* from the conference presentations and discussions. The first was generated by our basic aim: presenting and evaluating the relationship between specific approaches or methods and their applicability to what we are calling the Israeli Conflict System. Methodologically, one sub-issue was the question of how to measure behavior, which was related to the notion of “good” data and how to get it. Substantively, a central overarching theme was a broad notion of *context*: that the current conditions of the Israeli Conflict System were embedded in a broader temporal/historic context, a related cultural context, and a spatial/geographic context.

Before elaborating on how the individual sections and chapters build upon and transition to each other, a brief discussion of the volume’s themes is in order. Some of the chapters in this volume challenge commonplace assumptions held about *the context of the conflict system* (and in some way, about conflict in general). For instance, it is generally assumed that there are two parties to a “two-sided” conflict. But in reality, the professed and discussed dyad turns out to have a much more complex pattern of partisan interaction beneath the surface. Davies and Dubinsky’s chapter on language conflict and Barbieri and Lewis’ chapter on intra-conflict trade networks both demonstrate the ways in which inattention to alignments that don’t map well with the proposed dyad can lead to fundamental misunderstandings regarding the conflict system. By the same token, it is often assumed that *descriptions* of the conflict system and the *metaphors* engaged in understanding them are no more than helpful tools, and that they may be applied without much forethought. Yet, unlike pedestrian disputes such as those involving property boundaries and ownership, where a property line is a surveyable fact and an owner is a person named on a title, the terms of this (and other) conflict systems are highly volatile and fluid.

For example, in his chapter, focused on the use of the Holocaust metaphor (by both sides of the conflict), Musolff makes clear that even the most obvious metaphors of comparison must themselves be analyzed in order to understand the filtering effect that they produce upon perceptions of the conflict system (by the participants as well as outside analysts). This is also a useful place to introduce another theme that clearly emerged – the blurring of what seemed to be a *dichotomy* between approaches that focus more fully on *culture, symbols/symbolism and constructs*, and those that employ *some form of “rational” (or cost-benefit) models*, as well as ways to combine or reconcile the two. We find among the volume chapters some interesting counterpoints to commonly assumed parameters of understanding conflict systems, embodied in utilitarianism and belief in rational actors. While Bueno de Mesquita and Smith’s chapter makes clear that actors are indeed rational, it does not assert the common misconception that all actors utilize the same set of rationales. That is, contrary to the popular belief that human desires are universal (i.e., everyone wants the same things), such as conceived

in research that claims a biological basis for human nature (e.g., Arnhart 1998), experimental work by Geva and Bragg, and Kuperman demonstrate strong evidence for cultural influence on subjects' responses to conflict system management. So, while it is certainly the case that subjects are rational, their culturally determined belief-systems appear to have some role in determining what rationales they apply to conflict systems management, and how they will rank them.

Thus, different contexts create different types of conditionality under which different theories, approaches, and methods would be applicable, useful, or valid. These may be cultural contexts, economic contexts, spatial or temporal contexts. Which single context, or combination of contexts, is useful, in turn, also explicitly raises the question of the *appropriate levels of analysis for research and policy*. Levels of analysis lead directly to additional substantive themes such as: (a) the characterization of the *internal* Israeli Conflict System as a *protracted social conflict*, and (b) the use of *transnational or two-level models* to make the connections between the state-to-state level of the Israeli Conflict System, the internal Israeli component of the Israeli Conflict System, and the general cross effects of state and sub-state factors of not just Israel, but the regional Middle East system as well. One obvious conclusion to be drawn from these chapters is that analysts need a more fully developed understanding of the *complexity* of this specific conflict system, with protracted conflict as a major component, in order to pursue more efficiently policy proposals for making progress in conflict management and resolution.

The volume begins with the section titled "Events and networks of events," as much of the analysis will focus on the actions of parties, both conflictual and cooperative – military/security and economic. This section introduces the issues of the need for data, and "good" data. This enterprise begins with the Schrodtt and Yilmaz chapter, and the Thomas chapter, both of which specifically discuss and utilize new techniques of event data generation and analysis to the Israeli Conflict System. The study of events stresses patterns, and the next three chapters use (and/or criticize) various forms of network analysis to look at the relationships between conflict and economics for sets of countries, or groups internal to Israel. The Thomas chapter also introduces the important theme of *protracted conflict*. The Maoz and San-Akca chapter, and the one by Jilani et al. look at external networks. Barbieri and Lewis not only stress the nature of data, and the quality and availability of data, but continue the theme addressing internal–external relations (begun by Schrodtt and Yilmaz). Additionally, they raise important questions about the nature of protracted conflict along the economic dimension.

The second section is titled "Contexts: space, time, and identity." The Starr et al. chapter carries forward the dual themes of event data and its analysis, and protracted conflict. The spatial/geopolitical context is introduced here, using GIS methods to look at the external, cross-border conflict of Israel and its neighboring states. GIS is also used to look at the internal Israeli–Palestinian protracted conflict. Both analyses, but especially the latter, begin to raise issues involving identity, culture, and perception that are also central to protracted conflict. Dubinsky