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Notes and Comments

Arab Behaviour Towards Israel: Strategic Avoidance or Exploiting Opportunities?

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Scholars often observe that the foreign policies of states are not made in a vacuum but rather are determined or moulded to a significant degree by the external and internal actions of rivals. Domestic unrest is often considered a potential impetus for changing strategic behaviour. Leaders may be tempted to employ force externally to divert attention away from domestic unrest. The intended result is a 'rally round the flag' effect that culminates in higher approval/support for the executive as citizens forget about domestic problems and pay attention to a common adversary. One implication of this sort of 'diversion' is that potential scapegoats might employ strategic behaviour to avoid becoming a diversionary target. In other words, when they witness domestic unrest in a rival state, they worry that the rival may lash out at them and thus engage in 'strategic avoidance'.[1]

Conversely, strategic behaviour may lead to a greater chance that the potential 'diverter' will itself be targeted for hostile behaviour. Erstwhile scapegoats may view periods of social unrest such as elections, domestic political protests or unstable cabinet structures in the other country as convenient and favourable times to escalate hostility. Such situations are viewed as *opportunities* that are ripe for *exploitation*.

Alastair Smith's work has been extended to both the US case and a comparative cross-national study.[2] Our purpose here is to extend this line of inquiry by looking at a region of the world locked in a long-term hostile relationship; namely, the Middle East. Our approach builds upon previous research that addresses the strategic interaction of enduring rivals.[3] Specifically, we explore strategic avoidance and opportunity exploitation explanations of conflict in the three main Middle Eastern enduring rivalries: Israel–Egypt, Israel–Jordan and Israel–Syria.[4] Our goal is to determine which theoretical viewpoint best captures hostility dynamics in the Middle East conflict milieu.

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[1] This intriguing school of thought emanating from the game theoretic work of Alastair Smith, embodies the *strategic avoidance* model. See Alastair Smith, 'Diversionary Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems', *International Studies Quarterly*, 40 (1996), 133–54.

[2] For the US case, see David Clark. 'Can Strategic Interaction Divert Diversionary Behaviour? A Model of U.S. Conflict Propensity', *Journal of Politics*, 65 (2003), 1013–39. For the cross-national study, see Brett Ashley Leeds and David Davis, 'Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 41 (1997), 814–34. Other work on this line of inquiry can be found in David Leblang and Steve Chan, 'Explaining Wars Fought by Established Democracies: Do Institutional Constraints Matter?' *Political Research Quarterly*, 56 (2003), 385–400; Giacomo Chiozza and Henk Goemans, 'Avoiding Diversionary Targets', *Journal of Peace Research,* 41 (2004), 423–43; and Ross Miller, 'Regime Type, Strategic Interaction and the Diversionary Use of Force', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 43 (1999), 388–402.

[3] See Zeev Maoz and Ben Mor, 'Enduring Rivalries: The Early Years', *International Political Science Review,* 17 (1996), 141–60.

[4] While we treat all three dyads as rivals, not all three dyads are coded as enduring rivalries during our time frame. We consider the three dyads as a rival milieu and use a cross-national design to capture the general nature of the strategic interaction argument. Regarding this, see Leeds and Davis, 'Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes'.

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To address these two theoretical viewpoints, we discuss how Israeli domestic unrest, elections and government structure tie into the two models. In general, each model sees events in the stronger state (Israel) differently. According to the strategic avoidance model, unrest in Israel that threatens to bring down the government might be more likely to elicit co-operative or 'kid glove' behaviour from the Arab states because Israeli diversion is more likely. The opportunity exploitation model portrays this unrest as actually strengthening the government's grip on power and minimizing any diversionary incentive. Such a scenario could result in a 'mailed fist' response from the Arab states. Israel's government structure provides similar features. A surplus Israeli government – one that has more than the minimum support needed to govern – is arguably more able to use force. The strategic avoidance model might predict that Arab states will co-operate more in the presence of surplus Israeli governments. These governments are also less likely to use diversionary force as their hold on power is relatively strong.

Finally, elections in Israel are also potentially threatening to governments that fear losing their hold on power. The months leading up to an election can also be a time of Israel hostility. By contrast, an election might also be construed as a time that an adversary can take advantage of an inward-looking Israel.

Essentially, the models have contradictory predictions for weak state behaviour in the face of domestic events in the stronger state. They are similar in that each is based on weaker states reacting to domestic events in a stronger rival. They differ in how they portray weak state risk propensity. The strategic avoidance literature says it is too risky to be provocative when the strong state experiences high levels of unrest. The opportunity exploitation model suggests that this is when it is least risky to be provocative.

This research makes three important contributions. First, we test strategic avoidance *and* opportunity exploitation models from the perspective of the potential target (the Arab states) and within the context of a long-term conflict. This is an important extension of Leeds and Davis's cross-national test of strategic avoidance.[5] Secondly, we employ a series of controls not used in the Leeds and Davis study (for example, war, cabinet structure and domestic unrest in the target state). Thirdly, our use of scaled behavioural data allows us to gauge overall co-operative *and* conflictual behaviour, rather than mere counts of specific hostile acts.[6] If we only look at discrete hostile acts by potential targets, as do most studies of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs), we ignore a host of important information.

Our study focuses on Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian behaviour towards Israel for the years 1966 to 1998. We control for four components of Israeli government and society: domestic unrest, elections, a Likud government and the Israeli coalition structure. Our basic assumption is that Israeli domestic conditions send (unintentional) signals to Israel's Arab rivals. The behaviour of the Arab states towards Israel is modified on the basis of these signals. Strategic avoidance assumes the potential targets interpret these signals as incentives to be cautious, co-operative or hostile. Alternatively, opportunity exploitation suggests that the Arab states will interpret these signals as windows of opportunity. As our empirical tests demonstrate, Israel's Arab rivals tend not to be deterred by domestic turmoil within Israel, lending credence to the argument that unrest in an adversary invites rivals to exploit the situation, and contradicting earlier findings.[7]

THE ROLE OF ENDURING RIVALRIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Because enduring rivalries account for a large share of international conflicts and have a high likelihood of producing ongoing tension, they provide an important starting point for empirical

[5] Leeds and Davis, 'Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes'.

[6] In a recent piece Benjamin Fordham recognizes the importance of this distinction in his study of US diversionary actions. He used events data in lieu of MIDs. See Benjamin Fordham, 'Strategic Conflict Avoidance and the Diversionary Use of Force', *Journal of Politics*, 67 (2005), 132–53.

[7] See Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of War*, 3rd edn (New York: The Free Press, 1988), regarding alternative findings to Leeds and Davis, 'Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes'.

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research on conflict behaviour.[8] Enduring rivalries occur when two states have at least six MIDs over a twenty-year period.[9] This temporal classification is based upon meaningful breaks in the MID data, although it is subject to debate.[10]

In addition to persistence and dyadic consistency, enduring rivalries entail competition over tangible (for example, territory) or intangible (for example, status) issues.[11] This is certainly true of the Arab–Israeli conflict, where enduring rivalries date back to the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948.

In this study we move beyond standard conceptualizations of enduring rivalries to examine the impact of domestic political processes. We focus on the twin concepts of strategic avoidance and opportunity exploitation to inspect the impact that domestic processes have on Arab state behaviour towards Israel. These ideas are not mutually exclusive. They both spring from the element of the potential diverter's level of uncertainty in the presence of unrest, an election or a particular coalition structure. This uncertainty opens up the range of foreign policy responses from the target. The two models then capture how the potential target interprets this uncertainty and increased choice set. So the key difference between the models is target state risk propensity in the face of uncertainty in the stronger state. The avoidance model assumes that targets will be risk averse in the presence of unrest in the diverting state. In other words, potential targets dwell on the possibility of overreaction by the diverter. The opportunity model assumes the opposite. When the diverting state is not experiencing unrest or an election, the responses of the target will be more towards the mean behaviour level.

Domestic unrest is a typical explanation given for diversion. Domestic protests could provide a context for governments to use diversionary force against rivals.[12] A potential target might change its behaviour based on social unrest in a stronger rival state. In other words, potential targets wish to avoid being the scapegoats of states pursuing diversionary tactics.[13] To this end potential targets will be less hostile when an adversary is experiencing domestic turmoil.

We test two sets of hypotheses corresponding to the two models. The motivation for this design is two-fold. First, it has been noted that future studies should address the possibility that strategic

[8] On conceptualizations of enduring rivalries, see Paul Diehl and Gary Goertz, *War and Peace in International Rivalry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Douglas Gibler, 'Control the Issues, Control the Conflict: The Affects of Alliances that Settle Territorial Issues on Interstate Rivalries', *International Interactions*, 22 (1997), 341–68; Maoz and Mor, 'Enduring Rivalries: The Early Years'; and John Vasquez, 'The Evolution of Multiple Power Rivalries Prior to the Second World War in the Pacific', in Paul Diehl, ed., *The Dynamics of Enduring Rivalries* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

[9] Diehl and Goertz, *War and Peace in International Rivalry*, p. 216.

[10] See Diehl and Goertz, *War and Peace in International Rivalry*, p. 235, for discussion of coding enduring rivalries based upon breaks in the MID data. For alternate conceptualizations of rivalry codings, see Erik Gartzke and Michael Simon, ' "Hot Hand": A Critical Analysis of Enduring Rivalries', *Journal of Politics*, 61 (1999), 777–98; William Thompson, 'Identifying Rivals and Rivalries in World Politics', *International Studies Quarterly*, 45 (2001), 557–86; John Vasquez, 'Distinguishing Rivals That Go to War from Those That Do Not: A Quantitative Comparative Case Study of Two Paths to War', *International Studies Quarterly*, 40 (1996), 31–58; and Frank Wayman, 'Rivalries: Recurrent Disputes and Explaining War', in John Vasquez, ed., *What Do We Know about War?* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

[11] Gary Goertz and Paul Diehl, 'The Empirical Importance of Enduring Rivalries', *International Interactions*, 18 (1992), 151–63.

[12] See Clark, 'Can Strategic Interaction Divert Diversionary Behaviour? A Model of U.S. Conflict Propensity', and Bruce Russett and Gad Barzilai, 'The Political Economy of Military Actions: The United States and Israel', in Alex Mintz, ed., *The Political Economy of Military Spending in the United States* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 155–81. There is debate in the literature as to whether diversionary force actually exists. For example, William Baker and John Oneal, 'Patriotism or Opinion Leadership? The Nature and Origins of the "Rally round the Flag" Effect', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45 (2001), 661–87, demonstrate that use of force does not enhance support. Of course, if leaders have no incentive to use force during periods of domestic unrest, the whole strategic avoidance argument falls apart.

[13] Smith, 'Diversionary Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems'.

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interaction 'sometimes produces threats and other times produces opportunities'.[14] In other words, the same process might generate different observed behaviour. Secondly, we emulate Leeds and Davis's interesting use of two sets of competing hypotheses.[15] Since that study compared diversion and strategic avoidance from the perspective of the potential diverter, our focus on the potential target necessitates a slightly different approach. Our first set of hypotheses is based on the strategic avoidance literature that predicts 'kid glove' behaviour from potential targets. The second on the 'window of opportunity' argument that rivals will take advantage of domestic disarray in their adversary in a display of 'mailed fist' behaviour. Our first strategic avoidance hypothesis is:

HYPOTHESIS 1a: *Arab rivals are more conciliatory towards Israel in the presence of domestic protests within Israel.*

Several studies of diversionary theory suggest that parties in power may try diversionary force just before an election. In terms of strategic avoidance, potential targets should be less hostile when rivals are facing elections.[16] In the present context, Arab states should be more co-operative when Israeli elections are imminent. In a specific study focusing on Israel, it has been found that Arab state actions tended to diminish prior to Israeli elections.[17] This finding is consistent with strategic avoidance. Our next hypothesis is:

HYPOTHESIS 1b. *Arab behaviour towards Israel is more conciliatory when Israel is facing an election.*

The opportunity hypotheses stem from realist theory and its emphasis on the pursuit of security advantages. [18] Much of this line of thinking comes from the work of Geoffrey Blainey.[19] In contrast to the strategic avoidance adherents, Blainey does not expect potential scapegoats to behave more co-operatively in the face of uncertainty in the stronger state. On the contrary, he expects the weaker states to exploit the uncertainty. The short-term uncertainty in the stronger rival reduces that state's relative advantage and thus signals a ripe time for weaker rivals to strike.[20] Essentially, factors that create uncertainty within Israel will lead to more hostile Arab state behaviour. Factors such as unrest and elections that cause distraction could be windows of opportunity that Arab states could exploit).[21] The following hypotheses are derived from the opportunity exploitation framework.

HYPOTHESIS 2a: *Arab rivals are less conciliatory towards Israel in the presence of domestic protests within Israel.*

HYPOTHESIS 2b. *Arab behaviour towards Israel is less conciliatory when Israel is facing an election.*

Our empirical tests seek to compare these two explanations for periods of hostile Arab behaviour towards Israel. In doing so we are not predisposed to either theoretical explanation. Instead, we recognize the role that competing explanations play in extending our knowledge of international

[14] See Clark, 'Can Strategic Interaction Divert Diversionary Behaviour? A Model of U.S. Conflict Propensity'.

[15] Leeds and Davis, 'Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes'.

[16] Clark, 'Can Strategic Interaction Divert Diversionary Behaviour? A Model of U.S. Conflict Propensity'; Leeds and Davis, 'Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes'; and Smith, 'Diversionary Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems'.

[17] Alex Mintz and Bruce Russett, 'The Dual Economy and Arab-Israeli Use of Force: A Transnational System?' in Steve Chan and Alex Mintz, eds, *Defense, Welfare, and Growth* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[18] Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979).

[19] See Blainey, *The Causes of War*. Earlier Machiavelli (and before him Plato) had observed the notion that domestic unrest can attract aggression from others. We focus on Blainey because of his straightforward elaboration of these issues.

[20] Blainey, *The Causes of War*.

[21] See Clark, 'Can Strategic Interaction Divert Diversionary Behaviour?' pp. 1017–18.

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processes, and seek to provide empirical verification for one (or potentially both) of these explanations that spring from the same idea.

DATA AND OPERATIONAL MEASURES

Having considered theoretical issues, we turn to the data and methods we use to test our hypotheses.

Dependent Variable

Data for the analysis are coded monthly for the years 1966–98. The dependent variable in each of the models is scaled co-operation/conflict on a monthly basis and measures Arab state actions taken towards Israel. In the analyses below, Israel is the 'target' and the three Arab states are the 'senders'. The data are from the World Event Interaction Survey (WEIS) and Kansas Events Data System (KEDS) datasets.[22] The data are scaled according to the Goldstein scale that was adopted for the original WEIS data.[23] Positive values indicate co-operative behaviour while negative values indicate hostility.

Events data such as WEIS and KEDS are coded according to what has been termed 'sparse parsing'.[24] Newspaper headlines are read into a computer program that codes lead sentences with reference to actor, target and action taken. In regards to the KEDS data, computerized machine coding is used to assign a WEIS code weight to each action undertaken by one of the actors towards the other. WEIS codes assign a co-operative or conflictual value to each event, and these events can be aggregated daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly or annually.[25] Our analysis is similar in fashion to previous work, but focuses solely on the three main rivals to Israel within the Middle East.[26]

Independent Variables

Israeli behaviour. We control for Israeli behaviour towards the Arab states. This is calculated in the same way as Arab state behaviour towards Israel discussed above. We lag this variable by one month as we expect some time elapse between Israeli behaviour and Arab state response.

[22] Philip Schrodt and Deborah Gerner, 'Validity Assessment of Machine-Coded Event Data Set for the Middle East, 1982–1992', *American Journal of Political Science*, 38 (1994), 825–54.

[23] Joshua Goldstein, 'A Conflict Cooperation Scale for WEIS Events Data', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 36 (1992), 369–85.

[24] Philip Schrodt, Shannon Davis and Judith Weddle, 'Political Science: KEDS – A Program for Machine Coding Events Data', *Social Science Computer Review*, 12 (1994), 561–88.

[25] WEIS is coded in a similar fashion, with the exception that it was hand coded, rather than machine coded. The WEIS data was originally developed by Charles McClelland, 'International Interaction Analysis: Basic Research and Some Practical Applications', Appendix G in *World Event/Interaction Survey (WEIS)*, *Coding Manual*, 6th rev. (1968), revised by Rodney Tomlinson, US Naval Academy. We thank Dr Tomlinson for providing us with the WEIS data. KEDS data is available on the KEDS website, http://www.ukans.edu/ ~ keds/. Information on how scales are assigned to WEIS codes can be found in Goldstein, 'A Conflict Cooperation Scale for WEIS Events Data'.

[26] Ideally we would have combined COPDAB and WEIS measures for the 1948–98 time period, to cover the majority of the history between Israel and her Arab rivals. However, as has been demonstrated, there are difficulties in scaling COPDAB with WEIS data. For details on the scaling issues, see Rafael Reuvney and Heejoon Kang, 'International Conflict and Cooperation: Splicing COPDAB and WEIS Series', *International Studies Quarterly*, 40 (1996), 281–306.

Additionally, there are concerns about the compatibility of the WEIS/KEDS data, due to coding issues (manual vs. machine coded), and temporal domain. WEIS covers the years 1966–92, and KEDS covers the years 1979–98. In order to ascertain any problems, we ran two additional models: 1966–92 with straight WEIS data, and 1979–98 with straight KEDS data. Results are identical in terms of direction of coefficients and significance levels as the results reported below for the entire series. Results are available from the authors.

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Justification for a one-month time lag on Israeli behaviour can be found in a number of published works.[27]

Domestic unrest. In order to tap domestic conditions in Israel and the Arab states we created measures of domestic unrest using data from KEDS/WEIS.[28] For the entire time period we used data from KEDS/WEIS. We counted all events during this time period that were coded as 131, 132 and 133 (make informal complaint, make formal complaint or protest, symbolic act). Since our data are monthly, we aggregated the number of events into monthly counts that ranged from a low of 0 protests in a month to a high of 73 protests in Israel. As a control we also include domestic Arab state unrest. Arab leaders could also be facing diversionary temptations that change their risk attitudes towards conflict. Arab domestic protests ranged from a low of 0 to a high of 35 protests.[29]

Israeli elections. We control for the possibility of elections influencing Arab state behaviour by coding the three months prior to national Israeli elections as 1 and all other months as 0.[30] The opportunity model implies that elections could provide an opportunity to strike while the Israeli government is focused on electoral politics. Israeli elections are heavily contested and involve rigorous campaigns and domestic debate, and therefore often distract the public from foreign affairs.

Government structure. Parliamentary governments (such as Israel's) are consensually governed and as such involve veto players.[31] Israeli cabinet structure could affect the nature of strategic interactions. It has been pointed out that, 'cabinet structure is a highly visible institutional arrangement' that 'has a strong effect on the likelihood of conflict initiation'.[32] States within a parliamentary system face different constraints than do those within a presidential system. The executive branch is often comprised of more than one political party, and the government must rule by coalition. Many rational choice theorists have pointed out it is difficult to arrive at decisions that satisfy all preferences within group settings.[33] In other words, the more voices there are in a cabinet, the more difficult it is to arrive at a consensus decision.[34]

[27] See, for example, Joshua Goldstein, Jon C. Pevehouse, Deborah Gerner and Shibley Telhami. 'Reciprocity, Triangularity and Cooperation in the Middle East, 1979–97', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45 (2001), 594–620; and Christopher Sprecher and Karl DeRouen Jr, 'Israeli Military Actions and Internalization-Externalization Processes', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 46 (2002), 244–59.

[28] See Sprecher and DeRouen, 'Israeli Military Actions and Internalization-Externalization Processes'.

[29] Because the domestic protests variables are drawn in part from the same WEIS/KEDS data that generated our dependent variable, we were concerned the two could be highly correlated. This was not a serious problem ($r = 0.28$ and 0.24 respectively for Israeli and Arab protests). One could reasonably question why we used aggregate number of protests within Israel as a variable, and did not distinguish between Arab/Palestinian protests and Israeli protests. Unfortunately, our data do not allow us to identify who is protesting. We do not see this as a critical shortcoming for two reasons. First, we are examining overall domestic unrest, rather than who is causing the unrest. Since diversionary theory implies that a leader will be more likely to externalize aggression when domestic circumstances are poor, aggregation of protests was the best means of examining this central core of diversionary theory. On a related note, Arab protests in Israel would be likely to have an impact on the core Jewish electorate thus leading to unrest in that sector that could lead to diversionary incentives. Secondly, since the protest data refer to Israel proper and not the occupied territories, the likelihood of *intifada*-style protests being captured in the data is reduced.

[30] Israeli electoral law calls for three months between dissolution of the parliament (Knesset) and new parliamentary elections, so the three months prior to the election are known to all parties, friend and foe.

[31] Dan Reiter and Erik Tillman, 'Public, Legislative, and Executive Constraints on the Democratic Initiation of Conflict', *Journal of Politics*, 64 (2002), 810–26; George Tsebelis, 'Veto Players and Law Production in Parliamentary Democracies: An Empirical Analysis', *American Political Science Review*, 93 (1999), 591–698.

[32] Michael Ireland and Scott Gartner, 'Time to Fight: Government Type and Conflict Initiation in Parliamentary Systems', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45 (2001), 547–68, p. 548.

[33] See, for example, William Riker, *Theory of Political Coalitions* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1963).

[34] See Tsebelis, 'Veto Players and Law Production in Parliamentary Democracies'.

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Surplus coalitions are those governments that can maintain a majority even if one small party defects. Minimal winning coalition governments need all coalition partners to remain in the government in order to maintain a majority. Parliamentary systems such as Israel that have had many surplus coalition governments may be less constrained.[35] Ruling parties in such coalitions may be able to place blame on another party in the coalition if a venture fails. The entire cabinet can take credit if the policy is a success. This also coincides to some degree with earlier findings which find that coalition governments in parliamentary systems are more likely to reciprocate force with force.[36] Governments comprised of numerous parties will be able to shift the blame for policy debacles, foreign or domestic, on to one another. Governments comprised of small numbers of parties have nowhere to project the blame. In one study it was discerned that minority governments are more constrained than are surplus types because of the prominence of veto players in the former.[37] They also show that minority governments tend to be more peaceful in terms of the length of time between conflict, and demonstrated that 'as the number of actors able to constrain government behavior increases, we are less likely to observe conflict initiation'. In other words veto players are less important in a surplus setting.[38]

An additional study looked at a variety of domestic political factors that might shape the initiation of disputes by democracies. One of the factors they focused on was the nature of the ruling coalition. Following the general trend in this literature, they hypothesized that single-party majorities would be more likely to initiate disputes as they do not need 'broad consensus to make policy changes'.[39] Minority governments would be least likely to initiate. They find, however, that coalition structure has no significant impact.

The Israeli case is difficult to ascertain, at least from previous scholarship. Some scholars have asserted that secondary parties have diminished power in surplus governments,[40] whereas others note that small parties such as the National Religious Party have been influential veto players in Israeli coalition politics.[41] Some have posited that because prime ministers in surplus governments are less dependent on support from any one party, they have greater foreign policy latitude.[42] Thus the preponderance of the evidence seems to indicate that surplus Israeli governments are more able to act decisively in expressing hostility towards an opponent.[43] If this is the case, the implication for strategic avoidance is that in order to avoid being targets Arab states will be less hostile towards Israel when Israel has a surplus coalition government.

[35] Doug Stinnett, 'International Uncertainty, Foreign Policy Shocks, and Surplus-Majority Coalitions in Israel' (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., 2000).

[36] Brandon Prins and Christopher Sprecher, 'Institutional Constraints, Political Opposition, and Interstate Dispute Escalation: Evidence from Parliamentary Systems, 1946–1990', *Journal of Peace Research*, 36 (1999), 271–87.

[37] See Ireland and Gartner, 'Time to Fight', p. 548.

[38] See Ireland and Gartner, 'Time to Fight', p. 551; see also Tsebelis, 'Veto Players and Law Production in Parliamentary Democracies'.

[39] Reiter and Tillman, 'Public, Legislative, and Executive Constraints on the Democratic Initiation of Conflict', p. 814.

[40] Stinnett, 'International Uncertainty, Foreign Policy Shocks, and Surplus-Majority Coalitions in Israel'; Ranan Kuperman, 'The Extent of Dissent: The Effect of Group Composition and Size on Israeli Decisions to Confront Low Intensity Conflict', *European Journal of Political Research*, 41 (2002), 493–511.

[41] Juliet Kaarbo, 'Power and Influence in Foreign Policy Decision Making: The Role of Junior Coalition Partners in German and Israeli Foreign Policy', *International Studies Quarterly*, 40 (1996), 501–30.

[42] See Stinnett, 'International Uncertainty, Foreign Policy Shocks, and Surplus-Majority Coalitions in Israel', p. 2.

[43] We made a preliminary investigation of this conjecture by testing a negative binomial pooled time-series model with counts of the number of Israeli uses of force as the dependent variable. Both surplus coalition and number of parties had positive and significant impacts on the number of uses of force against the three Arab states. We tested similar models using scaled Israeli behaviour towards the Arab states. Again, both variables had negative effects on behaviour. As we describe below, this also means the variables tend to make Israel more hostile towards the Arab states.

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The linkage to the opportunity model is just the opposite. Surplus governments are less likely to be in a position where a loss of power is imminent. There should be a weaker diversionary incentive. This could invite more Arab rival animosity or at least decrease co-operation. In terms of number of parties in Israeli government, as noted earlier,[44] multiple parties in government makes consensus more difficult. This could also invite 'mailed fist' behaviour by the Arab states. Thus the opportunity model implies that surplus coalitions will lead to greater Arab state hostility towards Israel.

It should be noted that Israel always tends to have a coalition government.[45] Hence, a Likud government is one in which the Likud party has a majority of the seats in the Knesset, but is still a member of a coalition. Likud governments in Israel have a reputation as being hawkish.[46] This is another domestic feature that sends a cue to Arab states that encourages them to become more co-operative. Given the hawkish nature of a Likud government, Arab governments are unwilling to confront them militarily, due to the almost guaranteed bellicose response to their hostility. In other words, Likud governments have greater resolve.

We develop two variables that capture party and cabinet dynamics. The first measure differentiates between surplus and minimum winning coalitions. We code this variable as 1 in months of surplus coalition government and 0 for months of minimum winning coalition or caretaker government. The second measure is coded as 1 during right-wing Likud governments and 0 otherwise.[47]

War. The final variable controls for interstate war. We code months in which Israel is involved in a war with one of the Arab states as 1 and 0 otherwise.[48] The wars identified in the Correlates of War (COW) data are those in 1967, 1970, 1973 and 1982.[49]

Table 1 provides the summary statistics of each variable. Because our data represent panels (countries) over time, we employ a pooled time-series approach. We follow the logic of the authors of previous studies,[50] who employ a similar pooled approach in their attempt to generalize strategic conflict behaviour. Because of the nature of panel data, issues related to autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity are a concern. Using ordinary least squares (OLS) estimates of the standard errors in a panel setting is problematic because these estimates may be misleading as a result of panel heteroscedasticity or spatial correlation of the errors. To overcome these pitfalls, we use the panel-corrected standard error (PCSE) procedure to estimate our model.[51] This procedure assumes that disturbances are heteroscedastic and contemporaneously correlated. Because of the nature of our time-series data, we also assume that there is autocorrelation within panels so we also correct for AR (1). Below we present the results of our statistical models.[52]

[44] See Tsebelis, 'Veto Players and Law Production in Parliamentary Democracies'.

[45] See Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, 2nd rev. edn. (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishing, 1989).

[46] See Arian, *Politics in Israel.*

[47] The data for these three variables are from Jaap Woldendorp, Hans Keman and Ian Budge. 'Political Data 1945–1990: Party Government in 20 Democracies', *European Journal of Political Research*, 24 (1993), 1–119 and supplemented with data from the Israeli Knesset, available at www.knesset.il.org.

[48] These data are from the COW project, available from the Correlates of War website, http://cow2.la.psu.edu/. For further information on the war data, see Meredith Sarkees, 'The Correlates of War Data on War: An Update to 1997', *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 18 (2000), 123–44.

[49] While some may argue that the inclusion of war as an independent variable is problematic, it should be noted that the WEIS/KEDS scale measures co-operation *and* conflict. Therefore, war is related to only one element of the dependent variable. War and the dependent variable are not strongly correlated ($r = 0.46$). Ultimately war is a powerful determinant of state behaviour and should be controlled for in a model of strategic interaction.

[50] See, for example, Leeds and Davis, 'Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes'.

[51] See Nathaniel Beck and Jonathan Katz, 'What To Do (and Not To Do) with Time-series Cross-section Data', *American Political Science Review*, 89 (1995), 634–47.

[52] Analysis was conducted using Stata 7.0

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TABLE 1 *Summary Statistics*

Variable	Mean	St.dev.	Min.	Max.
Arab scaled behaviour	− 7.10	28.44	− 417.00	73
Arab MID initiation	0.1987	0.3997	0	1
Israeli Behaviour	− 6.48	30.23	− 418.00	62.39
Israeli Protests	4.05	6.43	0	73
Arab Protests	1.51	3.37	0	25
War	0.03	0.16	0	1
Likud	0.40	0.49	0	1
Israeli Govt. Structure	0.68	0.47	0	1
Israeli Election	0.08	0.27	0	1

Notes: The dependent variable is Arab Scaled Behaviour in Model 1, and Arab MID Initiation in Model 2. The number of observations is 1,188 for all variables.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The results of our analyses can be seen in Table 2.[53] Model 1 is our direct test of the strategic avoidance model and the opportunity exploitation model. As can be seen, the statistical evidence supports the opportunity exploitation model. Model 2 is an attempt to replicate the strategic avoidance literature and its use of the MID initiation dependent variable. Since MID initiation is a dichotomous variable, we utilized a cross-sectional general estimating equation (GEE). We wanted to see if the strategic avoidance model performed identically in the Middle East case. The results indicate that Israeli unrest does indeed seem to reduce the chance an Arab state will initiate a MID. Thus to that point we are on the same footing as the strategic avoidance literature. We argue that the use of scaled behaviour provides a better test of the theory, however. With a scaled dependent variable that captures a much wider range of Arab actions in place, Arab behaviour seems to reflect an opportunistic tack.

It should be noted that we cannot directly compare our results, run with WEIS/KEDS data, with the results obtained elsewhere using MID data.[54] This is due to the perfect prediction of Israeli elections as an independent variable. There exist no cases in which there is an election and no MID in the same month; the elections variable is therefore dropped from the model. In any case, it appears clear that by using MIDs as the dependent variable we find some evidence of strategic avoidance. This replicates the previous literature and is not surprising. This finding disappears, however, using scaled data that captures co-operative as well as conflictual behaviour.

Our analysis finds marginal evidence to substantiate the variant of strategic interaction proposed by previous studies. The opportunity exploitation model, however, seems the better fit based on its performance using scaled data. Arab states are less co-operative when Israel is suffering from

[53] We tested several versions of Model 1 with and without PCSE and AR (1). The results are virtually identical to those reported and are available from the authors by request. We also tested the models with a lagged version of the dependent variable. The results are again unchanged. Finally, we test the two models with unlagged Israeli behaviour. This results in Likud being negative and significant and parties and government structure dropping from significance. Israel and Arab state protests and Israeli elections each still have negative and significant impact on Arab state behaviour. In other words, although there is still strong support for the opportunity model we do not report these numbers because of concerns over endogeneity. We feel it is theoretically justifiable to lag Israeli behaviour one month.

[54] The study we attempted to replicate was Leeds and Davis, 'Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes'.

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TABLE 2 *Arab Behaviour Towards Israel, 1966–98*

Variable	Models 1	2
Israeli Behaviour (lagged)	0.17***	0.036
	(0.03)	(0.02)
Israeli Protests	− 0.76***	− 0.147*
	(0.13)	(0.08)
Arab Protests	− 1.12***	0.18**
	(0.25)	(0.08)
War	− 78.11***	4.05***
	(5.16)	(1.42)
Likud	− 0.17	− 0.16
	(1.55)	(0.71)
Israeli Government Structure	− 3.86**	0.46
	(1.63)	(0.78)
Israeli Election	− 7.59***	
	(2.61)	
Constant	8.74***	− 4.96 ***
	(3.11)	(0.70)
R^2	0.47	N/A
Wald χ^2 (10), (6)	787.06	13.21
Prob $> \chi^2$	0.000	0.040
Predicted Arab behaviour based on Model 1:		
Baseline	− 7.10	
Israeli protest 90th ptl/election	− 66.51	
Israeli protest 10th ptl/no election	− 3.40	

Note: Model 1 is estimated using PCSE method and the dependent variable is monthly scaled behaviour of Egypt, Jordan and Syria towards Israel; Model 2 is estimated using the binary GEE method and the dependent variable is Arab MID initiation towards Israel; numbers in parentheses are standard errors; *Sig. at 0.10; **Sig. at 0.05; ***Sig. at 0.01, two-tailed tests; Model 1 corrected for AR(1); variables not being manipulated are set to mean. Number of observations in both models is 1,188.

domestic unrest or facing an election. They do not avoid conflict with Israel due to domestic turbulence within the Israeli polity; instead, domestic unrest within Israel increases the likelihood that Israel will be a target of Arab state hostility. Arab states appear to react to signals emanating from the domestic situations in Israel, but not in the manner outlined by strategic avoidance theory. The effect of Israeli elections is particularly large. Israeli coalition structure is also linked to more hostile Arab state behaviour. The presence of surplus coalitions leads to more hostile Arab state behaviour. These governments are more hostile towards Arab states, so strategic avoidance would imply that Arab states would be more co-operative. As mentioned, it is unclear whether this is linked to diversionary behaviour in Israel. The military resolve of Likud governments might also be expected to elicit co-operative behaviour from Arab rivals. The Likud variable is not significant in our models, but it does demonstrate the interesting finding that Arab states are less aggressive towards Likud governments. This is in spite of the fact that Likud is a more hawkish party. We believe that this finding arises because Likud's often bellicose tone deters the Arab states from being more aggressive towards Israel; they fear the repercussions of initiating such hostilities.

It is especially interesting to note that domestic protests within Israel tend to elicit co-operative responses from Israel's Arab rivals. This provides indirect support for the diversionary theory of

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war, since periods of domestic instability are surmised to be time in which a state lashes out at adversaries, real or imagined. This result also dovetails nicely with the finding above that Likud governments tend to elicit more co-operative behaviour from Arab states as well.

The coefficients generated from Model 1 can be used for forecasting. Table 2 also contains predicted Arab state behaviour based on three scenarios. In the baseline scenario with all covariates at their mean, Arab state behaviour is on the hostile end of the scale (− 7.096). After controlling for other factors, Arab state behaviour towards Israel is moderately hostile. With two key variables drawn from our research hypotheses (Israeli protests and elections) set to their 10th percentile, Arab state behaviour becomes more conciliatory, rising to about − 3.4. When these covariates are set to 90th percentile, Arab state behaviour becomes exceptionally hostile (about − 65). This is an important finding that can help inform the timing of mediation efforts in the region. For example, mediators pursuing preventive diplomacy may want to head off particularly hostile behaviour. According to our findings, these mediation efforts should time their efforts with the domestic situation in Israel in mind.

Strategic avoidance factors thought to preclude hostile action and/or make targets more co-operative actually do just the opposite. This confirms the opportunity exploitation school of thought. What we seem to have – at least in this system of enduring rivals – is that events in Israel signal opportunities for antagonism rather than avoidance. Rather than being the potential scapegoats referred to in the strategic avoidance literature, these states might be more likely to seize opportunities to become more hostile towards a potential attacker manifesting certain domestic indicators of instability.

CONCLUSION

The results of our analysis using a unique dataset provide some interesting insights into the dynamics of the rivalry process in the Middle East. This analysis extends the study of enduring rivalries and strategic behaviour to the Middle Eastern rivalry milieu by testing two explanations of weaker rival behaviour in the face of domestic unrest in the stronger state. We discern two key findings. First of all, using scaled behaviour, Arab states are less co-operative when Israeli has diversionary incentives. Rather than avoiding confrontation with Israel, the Arab states take advantage of domestic unrest within Israel, and increase their hostility at election time. This is strong support for the 'death watch' counter to the strategic avoidance argument.[55]

Previous research on enduring rivalries has rested upon empirical findings from data that only capture half of the picture rather than theoretically driven constructs of what constitutes state behaviour. The analysis presented here captures co-operation as well as hostility. The entire range of strategic interactions should be brought to bear – not merely the hostility end of the scale. Co-operative behaviour is important and can signal general trends towards reduction in tension between rivals. Certain hostile Israeli actions are not in response to MIDs. For example, the pre-emptive strike on the Iraqi nuclear facility in 1981 and the recent strike against alleged terrorist sites in Syria were not in response to specific threats or uses of force by these states. Therefore, looking for an absence of MIDs as evidence of avoidance of Israeli diversionary targeting will miss vital information. If a state truly wants to avoid hostility from Israel, we would expect it to be more co-operative. By examining the Middle Eastern rivalries with events data, new measures of domestic political signals based on coalition structure and domestic unrest, we have exposed the research agenda to new hypotheses and research directions.

Of course, it should be noted that the findings here are applicable to the three main enduring rivalries of the Middle East. A more thorough cross-national examination of rivalries and strategic avoidance/opportunity exploitation would help confirm the external validity of this study. As of now, however, we regard these findings as a sound basis for examining enduring rivalries from a different point of view than more traditional conflict-based studies have done.

[55] See Blainey, *The Causes of War*.

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One interesting notion that remains to be tested is whether use of force in states during domestic unrest is simply a response to other states that are taking advantage of the unrest. In other words American force at times of unrest could simply be a response to hostility initiated by others. Blainey suggests that unrest invites hostility.[56] However, it could both invite hostility and lead to diversionary motivations. This complicated scenario would probably best be tested using methods that relax causality assumptions.[57]

[56] Blainey, *The Causes of War*.

[57] See Sprecher and DeRouen, 'Israeli Military Actions and Internalization-Externalization Processes', on how causality assumptions could be relaxed in an analysis of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

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