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Protracted Social Conflict; Theory and Practice in the Middle East

EDWARD E. AZAR, PAUL JUREIDINI
and RONALD McLAURIN*

1. INTRODUCTION

For thirty years, the Arab-Israeli conflict has been termed a border conflict, a colonial conflict, an ethnic conflict and religious struggle.¹ It has been seen as a product of Big Power intervention or of World War II.²

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¹ See J. Bowyer Bell, *The Long War: Israel and the Arabs Since 1946* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969); John Davis, *The Evasive Peace: A Study of the Zionist-Arab Problem* (New York: New World, 1970); M. Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan* (New York: Quadrangle, 1974); J.C. Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950); Walter Laqueur, *The Road to War, 1967: Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968); Don Peretz, ed. "Israel and the Arab Nations," *The Middle East: Selected Readings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968); Fayez Sayegh, "The Encounter of Two Ideologies – Zionism and Arabism," *The Arab Nation: Path and Obstacles to Fulfillment*, William Sands, ed., (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1961); *Search for Peace in the Middle East*, (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1970); Shimon Shamir, "The Myth of Intransigence," *Israel and the Palestinians: Reflections on the Clash of Two National Movements*, Shlomo Avineri, ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971); Hisham Sharabi, *Palestine and Israel: The Lethal Dilemma*, (New York: Pegasus, 1969); and Charles Yost, "The Arab-Israeli War: How it Began," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 2, January, 1968.

² Barry Blechman, "The Impact of Israeli Reprisals on the Behaviour of the Bordering Arab Nations Directed at Israel," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.16, No. 2 (1972), pp. 155-82; John DeNovo, *American Interests and Policies in the Middle East, 1900-1933* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1963); Yair Evron, *The Middle East: Nations, Super Powers and Wars* (New York: Praeger, 1973); Herman Finer, *Dulles Over Suez* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964); Walter Laqueur, *The Road to War 1967: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, *op. cit.*; Royal Institute of International Affairs, *British Interests in the Mediterranean and the Middle East* (London, 1958).

It has been attributed to arrogance, to insecurity and to underdevelopment.³ It has been explained in terms of a campaign for hegemony in the area by one or another regional or international power.⁴ The host of theoretical concepts that have been offered in explanation of the Middle East conflict has been drawn from political science, psychology, economics, history, anthropology, linguistics, the literature of technology and cybernetics, theology and more.⁵ Some have simplified the analysis of conflict; others have made it very complicated indeed. Whatever the approach, however, there has been one predominant assumption underlying most of the conceptual conjectures: that the structure of the conflict is itself a product (or "output") of the interaction situation (regional/international). If this were indeed the case, it would then follow that the roots of the conflict have only to be discovered and somehow extirpated to bring about the end of the conflict itself.

Recent developments in the Middle East (e.g., the oil embargo, which appeared to some to have widened the circle of active participants in the conflict, and Sadat's trip to Jerusalem) appear to have surprised some observers. And out of this surprise has arisen a sense that reassessment may be in order. Some have been so optimistic that they have interpreted these developments as successful indicators of the end of the conflict

³ See John Davis, *The Evasive Peace: A Study of the Zionist-Arab Problem*, *op. cit.*; M. Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, *op. cit.*; and *Search For Peace in the Middle East*, American Friends Service Committee, *op. cit.*

⁴ See Malcolm Kerr, "The United Arab Republic: The Domestic, Political and Economic Background of Foreign Policy," *Political Dynamics in the Middle East*, Paul Y. Hammond and Sidney S. Alexander, eds., (New York: American Elsevier, 1972); W. Laqueur, *The Road to War 1967: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, *op. cit.*; Nadav Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation, 1948-1967* (New York: Pegasus, 1969); Patrick Seale, *The Struggle For Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); M. Sid-Ahmed, *After the Guns Fall Silent* (London: Croom Helm, 1976); Ivar Spector, *The Soviet Union and the Muslim World, 1917-1959* (Seattle: University of Washington Press); Walter Laqueur, *Confrontation* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974). See the following regarding superpower involvement in the various conflicts and arms races as approaches to penetration into the region: Mercer Cross, ed., *The Middle East* (Washington, D.C., Congressional Quarterly, 1975); R. Freedman, *Soviet Policy Toward the Middle East Since 1970* (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1975); Galia Golan, "The Soviet Union and the Arab-Israeli War of October, 1973," *Jerusalem Papers on Peace Problems*, 7 (June, 1974); Tareq Ismael, *The Middle East in World Politics* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1974); Drew Middleton, "Air Force Totals Aid Sent to Israel," *New York Times*, November 28, 1973; Laurence Whetten, *The Canal War* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974).

⁵ See the work on arms races in the Middle East (e.g., Norman Alcock, Fuad Jabber, Robert Pranger and Dale Tahtinen); psychological approaches (e.g., Daniel Heradstviet, Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi), social-psychological (e.g., Herbert Kelman and Steve Cohen); oil and resource politics and needs (e.g., W. Griffith, F. Itayim); nationalism and conflict (e.g., Hisham Sharabi, Fayez Sayegh); national identity and cultural explanations (Sayyed Yassin, for example); and much more.

spiral. In this paper we take the position that while major events have been occurring in the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli conflict is fundamentally unchanged, that it is only going through yet another phase which should be familiar to analysts of protracted social conflict.⁶ We argue also that while the Arab-Israeli conflict may indeed at one time have been the consequence of other factors, it has by now come to be itself a source of further conflict situations and as such both a mechanism that regulates inter-state interactions and an important part of the ideological content of the parties to it. We will stress in this paper, that *the* Middle East conflict has been a process manifesting continuous overt hostilities and producing the mentality and circumstances of the participants to it; that, as such, it cannot be stopped, on short notice, by specific action either by participants or "outsiders," but must run a very difficult and dangerous course before it decays or transforms itself.

We are aware that the immediate reaction to our evaluation of the future of Arab-Israeli relations will be disappointment on the part of many persons who, like us, wish to see a peaceful, just, lasting and rapid settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Our disappointments aside, we have an intellectual responsibility to analyse the total set of interactions, goals, capabilities of parties to the conflict, and consequences of policies pursued in the Middle East, and to conceptualize, analyse, and report about these matters as objectively as is humanly possible. We feel that many of the scholarly writings about the Arab-Israeli conflict, as manifested in the more popular models used to analyse the conflict and the policies developed on the basis of them, have either been partially inaccurate or of limited utility. Now, in the Middle East of 1978, we find the conflict situation in a *worse* condition, in that the private and public positions and behaviour of the parties warn us of frightening consequences for the region despite all the attempts at talking, understanding and promising to work for a settlement.

Where might we look for ways to understand the present predicament in the Middle East? We suggest starting with the dominant view of contemporary international relations in general and conflict research in particular with a review of the empirical literature.

⁶ A discussion of this type of conflict appears throughout the paper. We suggest however that the special issue of the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (1972, Vol. 16, No. 2) and the special issue of *International Interactions* (1977), Vol. 3, No. 3 on the Middle East conflict make a good starting point for some of the issues involved in protracted social conflict analysis.

2. EMPIRICAL INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND CONFLICT BETWEEN SMALL STATES

Taking stock of the literature of empirical international relations, we find that the greater part of the accumulated body of theory, methods and findings deals with issues such as escalation of inter-state conflict; the arms-race spiral; overt behaviour during international crises at the superpower level; the role of third parties in conflict escalation and reduction when these parties are superpowers or their surrogates; tension and Cold War; and the limited effectiveness of international organizations and institutions at the onset of actual hostilities.⁷ There are, of course, many more specific findings and clusters of findings about conflict situations, and inventories of them are available in most libraries. In general terms the concerns, perspectives and conceptual methodologies used in empirical international conflict research are superpower-inspired. The reasons advanced to account for this state of affairs are plausible: the role, power, responsibilities and prerogatives of superpower states are of a magnitude such as to dwarf those of the small states of the world. Superpowers establish the agenda of issues in international relations, and determine (directly and indirectly) the parameters, type and intensity of interactions in the international system. The rest of the world, the theory has it, provides arenas for superpower competition and consists itself of states that are merely clients who benefit or suffer commensurately with their leader/ally.

If superpower politics is the politics that counts, then the empirical researcher on conflict and cooperation has been perfectly justified in assuming over the past 25 years that to bring about change in the world one needs only to focus on the superpowers, their behaviour, their alliance linkages and the like. And events generated in the international system will make a difference if the superpowers have inspired or sanctioned them. In such an international system, there are allies and leaders and much of their internal and external interactions are coordinated for their mutual benefits. This is why the initiatives of small nations, whether toward the superpowers or toward one another, will be muted, or amplified and supported, or rejected in terms of the utility of such initiatives to the superpower concerned. This is also one of the reasons why it is difficult to convince relevant political actors that interactions between small states are locally inspired.

⁷ See Edward Azar, "Conflict Escalation and Conflict Reduction in an International Crisis: Suez, 1956," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1972); Alan and Hanna Newcombe, *Peace Research Around the World*, Canadian Institute for Peace Research, Ontario, Canada, 1969.

Given these conditions, one can understand why frustrations and failure tend to befall most of the non-superpower and non-strategic attempts at moving toward resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. While these conditions are not sufficient to understand the complexity of the resolution process of the Arab-Israeli conflict, they are but necessary.

We have asserted so far that to understand the present and potential futures of the conflict in the Middle East (and elsewhere in the Third World), one must understand the "rules" of the international political game, as established by the superpowers who dominate the theory and practice of international relations. Small states in the international system can interact in a number of areas but they have to play within certain parameters. This does not make small powers irrelevant, but it makes them less significant than one might otherwise reason. We believe that small states can influence the direction of international politics less at the "input" side of the equation and more at the "output" side. They can, up to a point, play a negative role, delay actions and thus appear to alter the process of international activities.⁸ Success, even at this level, cannot be predicted easily. Sooner or later, the international system appears to respond to the wishes of the superpowers more than to any other voice.

We believe that in order to better evaluate the future of peace in the Arab-Israeli and other non-superpower/strategic conflict arenas in the world, one must turn to the analysis of overt protractedness and social structural properties of some conflicts. Such an approach might make it easier to describe, explain and perhaps predict regional, ethnic and local conflicts that prevail in and between small states.

3. PROTRACTED SOCIAL CONFLICT

A. *Frequency and Type of Conflicts Since World War II*

Conflict situations in the international system have been on the increase since 1946. We have seen much domestic civil strife, many regional crises, international tensions and threats of global wars, and there have been a substantial number of attempts at intervention, gunboat diplomacy, and outright aggression and occupation. These situations have occurred throughout the world. In an attempt to understand contemporary conflicts, Edward E. Azar has categorized conflicts into "clearly international conflicts or wars," "clearly civil wars," and thirdly "a mixture of international and civil wars,"⁹ and has coded the occurrences of these

⁸ This is precisely what is going on in the Middle East at this time in history. It is our expectation that the trend will continue for the next five to ten years.

⁹ These data are available for those who request it.

TABLE I
SELECTED PROTRACTED CONFLICTS

<i>Conflict Actors</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>External Parties</i>
Kashmir (India, Pakistan) & India-Pakistan	1947-49 and many years of tension since 1947	China
Arab-Israeli	1948-78	UK, USA, USSR, and many others
China-Taiwan	1949-78	USA and others
North Korea - South Korea	1950-78	USA, NATO, USSR, China, and others
Cyprus (Turkish-Greek)	Pre - and post - 1962	NATO, others
Trieste (Italy-Yugoslavia)	1947-53 and after	
Cambodia - South Vietnam	Since 1949	USA, China and others
North Vietnam - Laos	1953-57 and after	
Somalia - Ethiopia	1961 to present	Arab states, Western and Eastern bloc states
Lebanon (internal and inter-Arab)	1945 - present	Arab, USA, USSR, France and others
Northern Ireland	Especially since 1970	UK
Sino-Soviet	Since the 1950's but especially since 1963	
Berlin (Germany W and E and NATO-Warsaw Pact)	1948 to the present	

South Africa, Rhodesia and many such ethnic conflicts fall within this category of protracted social conflicts. We give the above examples in order to illustrate the point established earlier in the paper.

throughout the world on a yearly basis. He reports that a large number of post-World War II conflicts have been protracted and socio-ethnic as opposed to strategic conflicts.

Azar has found that the Third World has experienced most of the conflict and overt violence of the past thirty years. He has also reported that the Big Powers' and the superpowers' interventions in these conflicts have added to their severity and cost and introduced protractedness and horrible consequences to what otherwise could have been a less salient set of conflictive interactions. Table II below, is computed on the basis of the data scored in Azar's Conflict and Peace Data Bank (COPDAB) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.¹⁰ The following brief summary shows the relative involvement of the Middle East region in the number of conflicts since World War II.

Using the conflict-years as a measure of a conflict's saliency, Azar's findings and those reported by Azar and Eckhardt¹¹ were consistent with those of others in the field of conflict research.¹² Conflicts of the past thirty years increased substantially in the 1960's but have tapered off since 1973. The increase between 1945 and 1972 appears to be very sharp indeed. The conflict occurrences from 1945 to 1960 account for about 40 percent of the total global conflict in the post World War II period. About 50 percent of all the conflicts of the post World War II period took place between 1961 and 1970. Not only have conflicts increased but interventions as well. The data show that 90 percent of the conflicts since World War II have taken place in the Third World. They also show that Western and Communist interventions in the Third World had increased between 1945 and 1970 to the point that leaders of these blocs had been parties to most of 641 conflict events. However, the data show a significant decrease in both conflicts and overt interventions since 1971. This new development was associated with relatively more conflict in the Middle East and far fewer conflict events in Asia, fewer internationalized

¹⁰ The Conflict and Peace Data Bank (COPDAB) is a computer-assisted approach to gathering international and domestic events on the nation-states of the world and some international organizations (political, military, economic, cultural, etc.). It is also a data storage and analysis facility at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. COPBAD was founded by Professor Edward Azar in 1969 and has been used by many governmental personnel, undergraduate and graduate students and professors seeking to monitor, describe and analyse international relations in quantitative or qualitative modes.

¹¹ William Eckhardt and Edward Azar, "Major World Conflicts and Interventions, 1945 through 1975," *International Interactions* (forthcoming, 1978).

¹² Research on international conflicts has been conducted by such scholars as Kende (1971), Singer and Small (1972), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Bouthoul and Carrere (1976), Butterworth and Scranton (1976), etc.

TABLE II
 CONFLICT OCCURRENCES BY REGIONS/TYPE
 BASED ON AZAR'S DATA

(A list of 641 major conflict events was used to generate 265 major conflicts in the world between 1945/6 and 1975. When 94 coups and 8 large-scale riots were subtracted from this list, 163 major conflicts (primarily protracted) remained. The conflicts below are grouped by region and type).

<i>Region</i>	<i>Conflict-Years</i>	<i>Intervention-Years</i>
Europe (N=31)	5%	6%
Latin America (N=25)	10%	4%
Middle East (N=14)	16%	24%
North America (N=5)	5%	3%
Black Africa (N=36)	21%	20%
Asia (N=13)	16%	17%
Southeast Asia (N=12)	27%	26%
	100%	100%
 <i>Type</i>		
Civil	44%	20%
International	29%	26%
Civil-International	27%	54%
	100%	100%

Notes:

N= ... after the region names indicate the number of nations in each region.

Conflict-Year is the number of years during which the conflict has taken place. It is the life-span of the conflict. Some conflicts last 30 years and some last a few months.

Intervention-Year is the number of years in which non-primary parties to the conflict were part of the conflict, incited it or kept fuelling it.

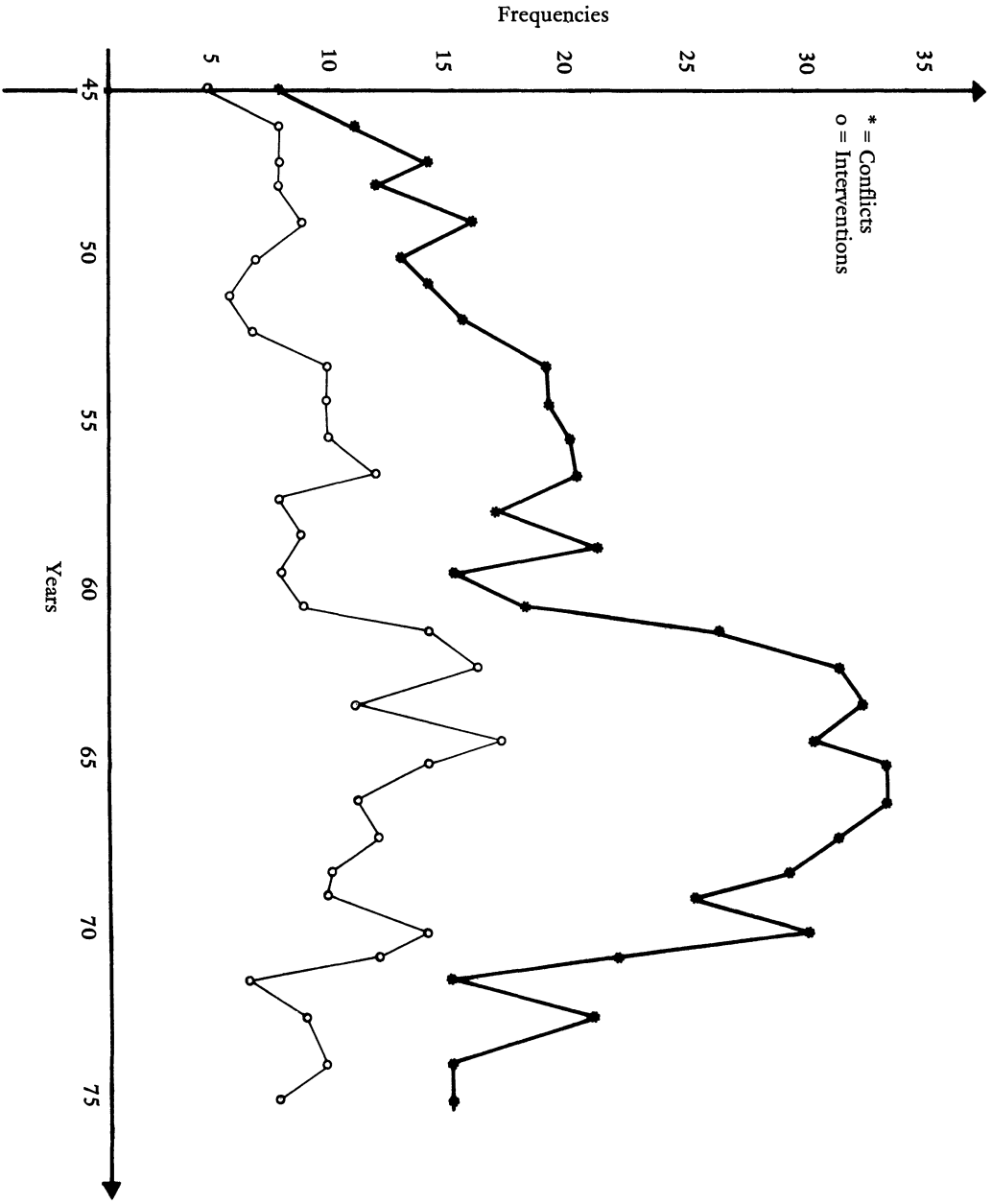


Figure 1. Annual Frequencies of Major World Conflicts and Interventions, 1945-1975

civil conflicts and more self-management of major conflicts in the Middle East and much less Western military intervention in world conflict generally. This may mean that the will to intervene in local conflicts has been reduced and it may also mean that other and more sophisticated mechanisms are in the working. All we are claiming is that the Third World has been the recipient of most of the world's conflicts and interventions, although recent years have yielded a slightly different trend. But as long as protracted social conflicts abound we feel that chronic conflict acts will emerge again and precipitate great amounts of havoc and dislocations, especially in the poorer sections of the world.

B. Properties of Protracted Conflict

Protracted conflicts are hostile interactions which extend over long periods of time with sporadic outbreaks of open warfare fluctuating in frequency and intensity. These are conflict situations in which the stakes are very high – the conflicts involve whole societies and act as agents for defining the scope of national identity and social solidarity. While they may exhibit some breakpoints during which there is a cessation of overt violence, they linger on in time and have no distinguishable point of termination. It is only in the long run that they will “end” by cooling off, transforming or withering away; one cannot expect these conflicts to be terminated by explicit decision. Protracted conflicts, that is to say, are not specific events or even clusters of events at a point in time; they are processes.

Social-ethnic conflicts tend to be protracted conflicts which exhibit a strong capacity to grow in terms of the number of involved actors and sub-actors and in terms of goals, objectives and types of grievances that sustain the conflict setting. Employing a different set of concepts, Anatol Rapoport has delineated some important characteristics of protracted social conflict. In his book *Conflict in Man-Made Environment* (1974), he distinguishes conflicts between two reasonably self-contained social-systems (exogenous conflict) from conflicts involving members of the same system (endogenous conflict). Within this distinction he suggests that *affect* (especially hatred) plays a far more significant role in the case of endogenous conflicts: in exogenous conflict, “obedience, not hatred,” is the principal lever by which the abstract power of government is transmitted to the human agents of violence under its control...”¹³ Hatred is visible, on the other hand, in communal strife and in massacres carried out by the populations themselves. Such hatred is engendered by an internalization of

¹³ Anatol Rapoport, *Conflict in Man-Made Environment* (1974), pp. 184-85.

the distinction between “us” and “them” in its most extreme form.

He goes on to suggest, however, that the original causes of the conflict may be obscured by the apparent causes:

It is not the abstract “issue” that guides the conflicts in their development but rather the identification of the participants with the contending social groups. The immediate criterion of identification may be several stages removed from the original issue.¹⁴

In contrast to exogenous conflicts where the goals being fought for are relatively clear, the issues being external, endogenous conflict often becomes a feud.

A feud is a conflict that maintains itself by a perpetuated perception of Self and Other... the most important aspect of this conflict is that recognition of membership in the alien group is sufficient basis for aggression.... The crucial characteristic of human feuds is that they are culturally transmitted, so that the distinguishing characteristics of the enemy may be anything: family membership, social class, nationality, religion, or ideology. The origins of any particular conflict are typically unknown to the participants. The conflict is a self-perpetuating process... [wherein] positive feedback predominates.¹⁵

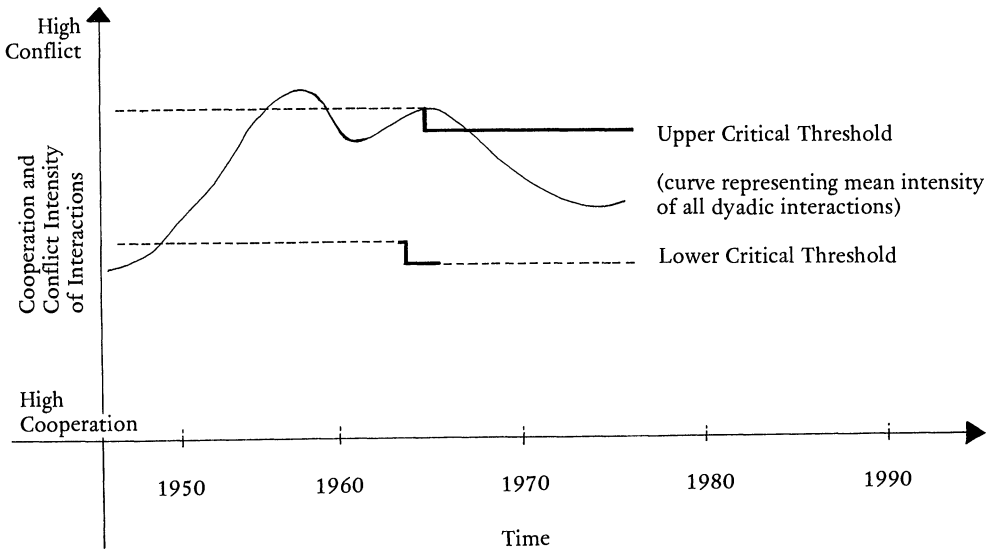
Protracted social conflicts tend to be a mixture of both ethnic and inter-state conflicts. They do not permit change in the fundamental grievances, and continually reduce the chances for dealing with conflict settlement issues. They tend to generate, reinforce, or intensify mutual images of deception. They tend too to increase the likelihood of confusion in the direct and indirect communications between the parties and their allies. They increase the anxieties of the parties to the conflict, and they foster tension and conflict-maintenance strategies. In the protracted conflict situation, the conflict becomes an arena for redefining issues rather than a means for adjudicating them; it is therefore futile to look for any ultimate resolution. The conflict process becomes the source rather than the outcome of policy.

In terms of the foregoing presentation one can expect a period of extreme tension in the protracted conflict arena followed, perhaps, by a cooling-off period. A useful tool for estimating the trends in the rise and fall of tension is the Normal Relations Range (NRR).¹⁶ International relations, whether conflictive or cooperative, comprise an array of different actions, policies and events. The NRR provides a way of organizing and analysing these actions, policies and events. An example of the Normal Relations Range is presented in the diagram below where US-USSR interactions are displayed.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁶ See Azar, *op. cit.*, 1972 for a discussion of the Normal Relations Range.



It will be observed that the NRR is bounded above and below by the Upper and Lower Critical Thresholds respectively. It is within this range that routine and expected behaviour takes place. Any behaviour above or below these boundaries are crises of war or of peace.¹⁷ Furthermore, it is the movement of nations toward these thresholds that one should monitor very carefully. The system for such monitoring is a sort of early warning system of social disruption or war.

In terms of the language and concepts presented above, any threats to the tolerable and predictable behaviour between states (i.e., any threats to the level of interactions within the boundaries of the NRR) will mobilize domestic and international forces to restore the status quo or the return to within the NRR. When states are in a protracted social conflict NRR, these forces will act so as to push the violators of the norms back to within the acceptable and familiar limits. Thus, when the upper critical threshold of the NRR of two conflicting states is crossed, the conflict events would be of extraordinary intensity and would be evaluated as

¹⁷ Edward E. Azar and Stephen Cohen, "Peace as Crisis and War as Status Quo; The Middle East Conflict Environment," a paper presented at the 1977 annual convention of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C.

posing such serious material and human damage as to reduce the states' vitality. This situation might mobilize the international community in an extraordinary way to move the conflict toward the status quo (i.e., the present NRR).

When the lower critical threshold is crossed, the crisis is due to an unusually cooperative event (such as, in the Middle East, Sadat's visit to Jerusalem). Such an event would demand an answer that would constitute a threat to the national consensus as defined in the protracted conflict, and therefore tend to destroy the delicate balance of national solidarity. This is why the status quo, with intermittent rising tensions and instability, is the most probable and most predictable future of nations that are locked into a protracted social conflict.

4. THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT AS A PROTRACTED SOCIAL CONFLICT

The characteristics of a protracted conflict, as we have seen, are

- *Duration* (protractedness) of a high-conflict NRR
- *Fluctuation* in the intensity and frequency of interaction
- Conflict *spillover* into all domains
- Strong *equilibrating forces* that constrain interactions to remain within the existing NRR and force interaction trends back to the NRR when they go beyond its boundaries whether in conflict or cooperation.
- The *absence of a distinct termination*.

If this behavioural definition of a protracted conflict is accepted, we may still question whether these behaviours accurately portray the pattern of Middle East confrontation. Let us then consider the conflict in terms of each of the four criteria we have set out.

We cannot of course determine whether the last characteristic applies to the Middle East problem, since there is *no* termination to the conflict yet. What can be observed, however, is the resistance of the Arab-Israeli problem to single initiatives. Indeed, as we shall point out, the protract- edness, fluctuation and equilibrating forces have resulted in a conflict of such complexity that facile solutions are non-solutions, and the ingredients of a sudden end to the conflict can scarcely be conceived. It is precisely because the general outlines of a settlement – i.e., the minimums for each side – are relatively clear that the inconceivability of a quick and sudden termination is a meaningful indicator that the Arab-Israeli problem does resemble a protracted social conflict.

And it *has* been protracted. We do not concur in the assessments of those who describe Arab-Jewish friction as “age-old.” Jews have lived in predominantly Arab countries for centuries with no more – and in many cases far less – discrimination than other minorities have experienced.

That ethnic or social differences have created problems at times is certainly true, but the consistently high level of social conflict we have said typifies a protracted conflict situation has not characterized Arab-Jewish relations until recently. There may be some debate over the beginning of the modern problem between the two groups, but most analysts would probably date it in the 1930's. This suggests that contemporary Arab-Israeli social conflict has been with us for approximately 40 years. However, even if one were to argue that 1948, instead, must be considered the point of departure, a thirty-year conflict must surely be considered to meet the temporal prerequisites of "protractedness."

During the past 30-40 years, Arab-Jewish antipathy has survived and grown to historic proportions. Jews and Arabs alike, inhabitants for centuries of many different areas along the eastern and southern borders of the Mediterranean, have been —or have felt— compelled to disestablish their ancestral lands to join their co-religionists in other regional countries, upsetting centuries-old traditions of social cooperation and, sometimes, integration.

Because of their duration, protracted social conflicts must fluctuate in intensity. Societies cannot sustain intense conflict indefinitely. The result is, as we have noted, a range of relations that is relatively more conflictive than the norm. This is certainly true of the Arab states and Israel: the two parties have been technically at war for 30 years. Even Arab states having little or no contact with Israel consider themselves — and are considered by Israel, the Arab world and the rest of the world — Israel's enemies. Thus, we note, it is not the confrontation states that employ the oil embargo in the service of their conflict with Israel; it is other Arab states, most of them relatively distant from the immediate *champs de bataille*.

Despite this durable conflict, however, relations do not remain at the war — nor even at the near war — level. They fluctuate, both bilaterally and regionally. There have been periods when a settlement seemed quite within reach, almost tangibly proximate¹⁸, times when men of vision — perhaps too much vision — in Israel, in the Arab world and beyond looked ahead to fruitful years of close economic ties, looked ahead to visions of the regional prosperity that would blossom from what appeared to be a

¹⁸ Such periods do not generally witness such regionally internal initiatives as that by Sadat in late 1977. Rather, periods of relative cooperation have generally been gradual. And, importantly, at least one side has always recognized the temporal limits to these eras of cooperation. Relatively peaceful relations existed between Israel and Jordan between 1968 and 1973, for example, but the absence of a resolution to the West Bank and Palestinian problems and to the problems posed by the continued Israeli occupation of other Arab territory foreordained the early end to this period.

trend toward “normalization.” These hours of Hope and the long hours of War, four¹⁹ sanguinary wars since 1948 and the untold (and often told) grief of bombings and terror — whether borne by shadowy human figures for the purpose of liberation or modern aircraft as retaliation or retribution — that stretch back four decades — both periods must be taken together. And together they surely meet the criterion of fluctuation in relations that typifies protracted conflict.

Protracted conflicts arouse intense animosities for reasons we have indicated. This animosity causes the conflict to spill over a broad spectrum of issues and to *in and of itself* push the rivalry outside the inter-state framework. In the case of the Middle East, this spillover has been singularly pronounced. The Arab-Israeli conflict is a fundamental issue in the politics of each of the confrontation states, substantially (if not decisively) affecting interest group formation, and articulation, and fractionation. Treatment of the Jews in Arab countries and of Arabs in Israel has been a function of the conflict as well: nationalism and social identity have been subordinated to the protracted Arab-Israeli social conflict.

Given the appalling cost in human lives and in aggregate suffering, in the diversion of resources that might be allocated to economic and social development, why have all of the now-countless attempts to reduce the level of hostility in Arab-Israeli relations aborted? Why have four wars not terminated the conflict? As with other protracted conflicts in history, one can point to certain reasons in each case, but this tendency obscures the central fact that forces very much part of the conflict dynamics constantly work to return deviations from the NRR in interaction levels or frequencies back to the Arab-Israeli norm, to the NRR, to the dominant tenor of the relationship. When animosities (or frustrations or simple calculations) result in the outbreak of hostilities at the level of war, outside powers or the costs of sustaining high-intensity military operations may push interactions back from war to lower-level conflict. Similarly, when cooperation has exceeded the established critical threshold in the NRR, other Arab countries, Israeli parties, the Palestinians, or some economic or other subcultural group have always forced the interaction line to less cooperative levels, back, in other words, to within the extant NRR.

By “equilibrating forces,” then, we do not mean forces conducting away from war and to “peace.” Rather, in this context, those forces are

¹⁹ Or three (if one considers the 1956 Suez crisis to be purely an Egyptian-Israeli and Egyptian-European confrontation) or five (if the War of Attrition is to be counted). In fact, the level of damage resulting from some “raids” has exceeded that in other developing countries’ “wars.”

equilibrating that tend to support, reinforce and maintain relations at, or return bilateral or multilateral Arab-Israeli relations to, their previous equilibrium range, a range that is, unfortunately, at a high level of conflict. Thus, since Arab-Israeli equilibrium (which is but another term for the NRR) is generally conflictive, equilibrating forces moderate the intensity of conflict and cooperation to correspond with the NRR. These forces have proliferated and grown as a result of the protracted nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict. By contrast with the present, the period from 1935 to 1948, which seemed painfully complicated at the time, appears quite simple in retrospect. There was no displaced Palestinian Arab population; stated Zionist goals were more limited; the tools of violence were fewer and far less potent; the Arab peoples had only begun to speak with the strident and discordant voices of their several nationalisms; Palestinian and Zionist Jews worked together with a far greater degree of unity in political vision and aspiration than they were to know after Israeli independence. Issues of energy production and supply, political ideology, water use, agricultural production and the role of the military, though all were in evidence in one form or another, were less central to regional political evolution than each has been since. This is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict: that marginal issues become salient problems as a result of the conflict even as they in turn exacerbate it. Yet, it is also true that they work to constrain conflict as well as cooperation. For example, even as the dizzying pace of arms accumulation²⁰ increased the level of violence possible in Arab-Israeli wars, it also operated to reduce the strategic objectives of the Arab confrontation states.

In terms of the four criteria used to determine whether a current, specific international problem may legitimately be considered a protracted social conflict, the Arab-Israeli confrontation provides ample evidence to suggest that it should be placed within this framework. Moreover, additional experiences lead us to believe it may meet the historical test as well – that the termination will be gradual rather than sudden or distinct.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF PROTRACTED SOCIAL CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Acceptance of the applicability of the protracted social conflict to the

²⁰ We avoid the term “arms race” advisedly. See the thoughtful distinction between various patterns of arms accumulation made by L.W. Snider in John A. Ferejohn, R.D. McLaurin, Jeffrey Richelson, and Abraham R. Wagner, *Quantitative Measures of Arms Control Criteria for Arms Transfers* (tentative title) (Marina del Rey, California: Analytical Assessments Corporation and Alexandria, Virginia: Abbott Associates, forthcoming).

Middle East carries several implications for the future of the Arab-Israeli problem and for our expectations and aspirations with respect to its termination.

We should recognize that strong forces will operate to undermine attempts to bring about a settlement. Despite the apparent outlines to which any successful settlement must adhere, initiatives to reach a general settlement that appears to meet all minimum demands will encounter strong new pressures from groups as yet unformed or impotent.²¹ For it is in the nature of the dynamics of protracted social conflict that the many benefits accruing from an institutionalized conflict are clearer or more real and immediate than those devolving from peace. Settlement is foreign, unknown, unpredictable — the benefits are hypothetical, generally attractive from a distance but more distant, less certain and more costly as peace nears. Scholars whose productivity is rooted in the conflict; the military, whose prestige and budgetary support are associated with the continuing confrontation; economic and social groups whose place in the new circumstances is wholly unforeseeable; and the general public, whose current level of external economic support, dependent on the conflict, is to be bartered for the savings that *may* (or may not) result from the reduced security threat — all these groups, however anxious for peace in the abstract, recognize and appreciate far more fully the costs of a specific peace as it nears.

And this is not to speak of the more subtle psychological pressures against the crisis of peace. The protracted social conflict has, as we have seen, forcefully captured and held important segments of national identity. Moves that signal a potential termination to the conflict engender powerful identity crises on a personal and subcultural as well as a national scale.

Similarly, once conflict termination through war must mean genocide, neither superpowers nor other actors in the world community are likely to permit a decisive or sudden termination by force of arms. Israel's nuclear capabilities²² have not been employed, and most observers assume that resort to nuclear weapons is likely only if Israeli survival appears to be in

²¹ One can hardly refrain from referring to Murphy's Law.

²² Although Israel has not formally admitted having nuclear weapons, evidence to support the existence of an Israeli nuclear military capability is overwhelming. The US Central Intelligence Agency concluded that Israel had nuclear weapons some years ago, citing strong evidence. See USA CIA, "Prospects for further proliferation of nuclear weapons," Memorandum DCI/NIO 1945-74, September 4, 1974. (Classified Secret), p. 1. [This document was released under a Freedom of Information Act request.]

question.²³ Israel cannot expect to annihilate²⁴ the Arab peoples of the Middle East, and conquest and occupation of additional Arab lands can only mean increased security problems when the demographic future of Israeli control over currently occupied territory is already ominous.²⁵ The inability of Arab forces to eliminate the reality of Israel is well established. The October War showed how well this lesson had been learned, since it featured very limited Arab objectives which were themselves only partially realized. Militarily, no Arab force or coalition of forces can defeat Israel now or in the immediate future. Thus, neither side will eliminate the other as a party to the conflict; neither side can hope to achieve its maximum territorial/ideological objectives.

Consequently, we can expect both crises of peace and those of war to fall short of bringing about an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The confrontation will continue, even as the efforts to reach a settlement will continue, and even as all interim and partial agreements will fall far, far short of effecting an end to the overall confrontation.

Meanwhile, the ideological basis of the conflict leads to an increasingly complex definition of “self” and “enemy,” partly because of constant goal proliferation and redefinition. This process will continue so long as the conflict itself continues and the political, economic and social philosophies of Middle East Arab and Jew manifest internal schisms. Although the protracted Arab-Israeli social conflict absorbs, i.e., reaches to affect virtually all realms of human endeavour in the region, the latter have a life of their own. They are affected, but generally not definitively, by the conflict; these issues would exist in similar forms – and do – without the Arab-Israeli problem.

Moreover, struggles for recognition and acceptance – which surely

²³ A major issue is the “line” or trigger as defined by the Israelis, the definition of a threat to Israeli survival. It may be as little as a crossing by hostile ground forces of the pre-1967 Israeli borders, for example, even though the Arab states’ limited capabilities to mount and support sustained offensive operations means – for the foreseeable future – that such an invasion would necessarily be of short duration.

²⁴ It appears that current Israeli strategy – which has been described as the intention to fight a “war of annihilation” if hostilities erupt – is oriented toward the destruction (“annihilation”) of Arab *armed forces*, not of Arab civilization. Cf. Anthony H. Cordesman, “The Arab/Israeli Balance: How Much is Too Much?” *Armed Forces Journal (International)*, October 1977, pp. 32-39; Interview with Lt. General Mordechai Gur, *Christian Science Monitor*, August 30, 1977; Jim Hoagland, “War of Annihilation”; Israeli Contingency Plan Readied,” *Washington Post*, October 26, 1977; Dial Turgersom, “Armies Are Basic Israeli Targets: ‘Annihilation War’ is Key to Strategy, Officials Confirm,” *Washington Star*, October 27, 1977.

²⁵ See Edward E. Azar and Ronald D. McLaurin, “The Demographic Imperative in Arab-Israeli Settlement,” *Middle East Focus* (September, 1978 forthcoming).

describe much of the content of the Arab-Israeli conflict — cannot be “won” or “lost” through protracted conflict. Israel has “won” a grudging acknowledgment of its existence not because, but in spite, of the Arab-Israeli conflict,²⁶ and it seems clear that the perpetuation of that conflict has prevented Israel from adopting her natural role in the region.²⁷ That is, though Israel has been recognized and accepted *de facto* in terms of the State’s existence, Israel’s regional role has been neither recognized *nor* accepted. Quite to the contrary, the State of Israel is viewed as a polity apart from the region; the role is seen as without rather than within the region except in terms of the conflict itself. Nor will Arab recognition and acceptance in Israeli eyes be fashioned through conflict. Indeed, because of the conflict, Israel consciously seeks the antithesis of Arab recognition objectives, identifying some Arab populations (e.g., Druzes) as non-Arab and promoting their separateness. Israeli leaders and the majority Jewish population of Israel are not likely to accept the Arabism of the Middle East until the conflict is history, and Jewish Israel is a Middle Eastern state — in Arab eyes.

It is in this context that Sadat’s pre-1977 statements that conflict reduction was the business of this generation but that the building of positive peace was the business of future generations must be understood. The realism of gradualism is in the nature of protracted conflict. Political differences can be bridged without delay; social differences are far deeper and require a time for healing.

Another feature of protracted conflict is, as we have indicated, its appalling absorptive capacity. For the Arab-Israeli conflict, this means simply that enormous quantities of human and material resources will continue to be consumed in “wheel spinning.” The amount of time, treasure and technology allocated to the confrontation will continue to sap the not insubstantial reserves of each resident in or potentially available to the front-line states on both sides. Political dialogue and economic considerations — including manpower and social development decisions —

²⁶ Note that it was Habib Bourguiba, leader of a country never actively involved in the confrontation with Israel, who in the mid-1960’s first publicly suggested that Israel’s existence might as well be acknowledged in negotiations to end the conflict.

²⁷ We recognize that “natural role” is an infelicitous phrase, since role depends very much on regional issues, national resources, location, and the nature and quality of leadership. Yet, the diversity of the Middle East results in numerous schisms. Whatever the “natural role” of Israel, there are strong indications that fluid (and perhaps ephemeral) alliances between the Jewish State and some of its Arab neighbours might have eventuated in the absence of constraints imposed by the Arab-Israeli conflict.

are hostage to the Arab-Israeli conflict. An Israeli economy potentially the beneficiary of very high technology has wasted immeasurable resources as the most advanced technology is heavily military-oriented.²⁸ Arab states have spent scarce billions on arms, losing much of the development potential of large-scale financial transfers from the oil-producing states of the Gulf.²⁹

Finally, we can expect to continue to see the Arab-Israeli conflict play its traditional role as an excuse for inaction. This is one of the most useful and, perhaps, most destructive of the implications of the protracted conflict. Inaction is excused as caution; indecision, as cunning. The Arab-Israeli conflict has been exploited and continues to serve as a rationale for both the Arab states and Israel when leadership prefers to ignore a knotty problem rather than to deal with it. Both Israel and its Arab neighbours entertain major social problems in terms of ethnic minorities; income and services distribution; the role of religion; health delivery; and important shifts in societal composition or mobility. These problems are being assiduously avoided in the name of security, in the name of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

At the same time, Israeli leaders have used the national democratic process, and Arab leaders their own national political processes, as an excuse for their inability to address in a direct and timely fashion the central issues of the conflict. Each in his own way claims his public is not yet "ready" to confront specific aspects of the situation. Leaders of the Jewish State hold democracy to blame; their counterparts, their need to maintain domestic political stability. Neither finds it feasible to display political daring, to *lead*, but both expect their counterparts to do so. This is only perhaps the most obvious way in which protracted social conflict in the Middle East manifests itself and works to perpetuate both behavioural and structural violence.

²⁸ Samuel N. Bar-zakay, "Technological Transfer From the Defence to the Civilian Sector in Israel-Methodology and Findings," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol. 10, 1977, p. 143.

²⁹ Whether these transfers would have taken place in the absence of the conflict is at best questionable, however. Yet the Kuwaiti example of financial power used for national security suggests that at least some of the billions would have been transferred regardless of the Arab-Israeli problem.