

Conceptual Descriptors of Enduring Interstate Rivalry: The Unremitting Conflict in the Middle East

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Abstract

This paper describes the multiple concepts commonly used to designate lingering interstate conflicts, and proposes an integrative conceptual approach that synthesizes components introduced by 'protracted conflict' and 'enduring rivalry' conceptualizations. Facts and events pertaining to the Middle East conflict before and after the introduction of the peace process are interpreted through three conceptually-driven propositions suggested by the integrative approach. In addition to validating the characteristic longevity of the Middle East conflict, the proposed integrative approach facilitates understanding major events of interstate and domestic violence in the region, ascertains the role of nongovernmental forces in maintaining the endurance of interstate rivalries, and identifies the geographic enlargement of the conflict.

Keywords: Enduring Rivalry, Conceptual Descriptors, Middle East Conflict, Peace Process

Introduction

The Middle East encompasses several unresolved conflicts. The Palestinian Problem continues to persist as the tricky core of the outstanding conflict, causing conflict between Israel and the majority of Arab states to endure. After the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in Iran more than three decades ago the lingering conflict in the Middle East enlarged to include the knotty rivalry between Israel and Iran. Unresolved tensions between Israel and Turkey have further expanded the lingering conflict in the region. As the resilient Iran-Israel conflict and evolving Turkey-Israel rivalry indicate, additional situations of potentially enduring conflicts have developed in the Middle East.

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The literature on international conflict commonly uses several conceptual formulations to describe conflicts that persist over extended periods of time. Using multiple expressions to characterize long-lasting conflicts creates the need to consider the nature of this multiplicity to contemplate potential conceptual overlap.

The research problem of this paper concerns the diversity of concepts used for enduring interstate conflicts, which provides basis for synthesizing these conceptualizations and proposing an integrative perspective. This perspective should facilitate attaining insights into the connotations of the durability and intractability of enduring rivalries. These two latter attributes of the Middle East conflict have survived despite the introduction of peace diplomacy in 1991, and in spite of the international community's adherence to diplomacy as the only viable option to address the conflict. The thesis of this paper is that concepts used for enduring interstate conflicts can be productively synthesized through pulling together the most salient properties of these conceptions, and specifying conceptual descriptors which can be used to investigate the dynamics of lingering interstate rivalries, of which the unremitting conflict in the Middle East is a major example.

Research Objectives: This paper attempts to achieve the following objectives:

1. Highlighting the essence of the multiple, yet interrelated, conceptualizations relevant to enduring interstate conflict, and proposing integrative conceptual descriptors of enduring rivalries.
2. Interpreting aspects of the Middle East conflict through evaluating conceptually-derived propositions informed by the proposed integrative descriptors.
3. Demonstrating the persistence of the Middle East conflict, much in agreement with the unremitting nature of this conflict and largely in spite of peace diplomacy.

Conceptualizations of Enduring Conflict

This section discusses the interrelatedness of multiple concepts used to describe long-lasting interstate conflict. It also introduces the underlying societal dimension into the category of enduring interstate conflict. This section then proposes integrative conceptual descriptors of enduring rivalry.

Multiplicity of Interrelated Concepts

Repeated militarized conflicts between the same sets of states constitute a distinctive type of international conflict, and this subset of international conflict accounted for forty-five percent of militarized interactions (Goertz and Diehl, 1992). The literature refers to this category of interstate conflict as "enduring rivalries" as opposed to isolated and situational wars, and postulates that they can last for several decades.

Interestingly, scholarly writings use multiple expressions to refer to lingering interstate conflict. In addition to enduring rivalry, the list of relevant formulations includes protracted conflict, existential conflict, intractable conflict, and strategic rivalry. Certain analyses delineate the conceptual construct of “enduring rivalry” in general, basically through establishing its substantive relevance and theoretical specification (Goertz and Diehl, 1993). Some studies use some of these concepts interchangeably, suggesting for example that protracted conflict and intractable conflict are synonymous (Coleman, 2003; 2004), while others emphasize the need to maintain the defining uniqueness of these concepts, especially the difference between strategic rivalries and protracted conflict (Colaesi and Thompson, 2002, pp 264-6). Additionally, the agreement over the distinctiveness of this subset of interstate conflict notwithstanding, conceptualization differs in specifying certain defining elements of the long-lasting interstate conflict. Colaesi and Thompson for instance do not specify the outbreak of warfare between rivals as an essential requirement of rivalry, whereas in other formulations a sufficient number of wars provides basis for identifying enduring rivalries (Gartzke and Simon, 1999, p. 778).

In view of the potentially considerable overlap among these various expressions, the situation can be viewed through the perspective of what is contrary is not necessarily contradictory, and it might also be reasonable to treat these formulations as indicative of theoretical intensity. Better yet, understanding cases of lingering interstate conflict can be enriched by considering aspects of this type of conflict each of the concepts attempts to highlight.

In the spirit of developing an inclusive approach to the multiplicity of concepts used for lingering conflicts, it is useful to underline the most salient attribute each of the conceptualizations introduces. Since some of these concepts may convey a degree of the notions implied by some of the other concepts, it is reasonable to only emphasize what any given formulation suggests more directly than the others. I therefore describe the conceptual expressions commonly used to describe lingering conflicts.

- *Existential conflict*: connotes the vital nature of stakes involved in the conflict, to the extent that the survival and welfare of either side in the conflict can only be achieved at the expense of the other side.
- *Strategic rivalry*: establishes a belligerent relationship between two sides, characterized by intense competition over incompatible goals of critical significance to both sides, leading to reciprocated hostile foreign policies.
- *Enduring rivalry*: emphasizes the persistence of conflict over time, in which belligerents compile a history of dyadic wars.

- *Protracted conflict*: suggests that conflict conforms to an underlying process which produces sporadic wars and hampers conflict resolution.
- *Intractable conflict*: signifies the complexity and indivisibility of the thorny issues of dispute, such as when national sovereignty is at stake or incentives for concessions necessary to reach compromise solution are lacking.

It should be noted that various spheres of rivalries can be identified within the overall conflict in the Middle East, and therefore it is useful to refer to each sphere in terms of the most relevant conceptual description. The Palestinian-Israeli problem constitutes the core of the Middle East conflict, and the identity and territory components of this problem make it primarily an existential conflict (Kelman, 1999). The broader conflict between Arab states and Israel can be illustrated as strategic rivalry. Absence of collective Arab war efforts against the state of Israel during recent decades turns this conflict into competition over strategic objectives and antagonistic sentiments. The Israeli-Iranian rivalry is over three decades old, and issues of conflict between the two sides evolve around serious security stakes, although a direct military war between the two states has not taken place thus far. This conflict is generally a strategic rivalry, although certain of its aspects seem to have evolved into existential conflict.

Bringing Society into Enduring Rivalry

Two additional conceptual formulations are still available when referring to conflict in the Middle East. These are the concept of 'systemic conflict' and the concept of 'intergroup conflict'. Although these two concepts do not immediately appear to overlap with any of the five conceptualizations of lingering conflict outlined above, we nonetheless need to include them in the assembly of conceptual descriptions that can be used for analyzing the long-lasting variant of interstate conflict.

Two reasons can be mentioned in justification of this inclusion. First, the concepts of systemic conflict and intergroup conflict are as creditable as any of the other concepts, essentially because their theoretical relevance to the discussion of lingering interstate rivalries is underscored by the direct emphasis they place on the inveterate psychological impetus which fuel interstate conflicts. Notions such as conflict, rivalry, and belligerency cannot be fully understood without the use of the psychological underpinnings of hatred, enmity, and antagonism which the concepts of systemic conflict and intergroup conflict introduce. Therefore, these two concepts cement the essences of the conceptual descriptions of lingering interstate conflicts.

Second, by including psychological sentiments and societal forces, these two conceptualizations more directly introduce domestic imperatives into the dynamics of lingering interstate conflicts. In the absence of the roles governmental institutions, informal domestic forces, and constituency dispositions play in influencing interstate conflict, analysis of the logic and dynamics of lingering interstate rivalries will not be based on the pervasive drivers which the social and psychological factors introduce in understanding unyielding international conflicts.

A brief description of the concepts of systemic conflict and intergroup conflict is in order. Systemic conflict involves cases in which interstate hostility is not limited to disputes between national governments, but rather whole societies are engaged in antagonistic relationships. In this type of belligerency each society views the other society through 'enemy' perspective, and therefore 'fight' becomes a likely course of action (Rapoport, 1974). On the other hand, intergroup conflict describes the relevance of social forces and societal actors to the process which shapes rivalry between two societies. Formation of, and identification with, a social group is postulated to create ingroup camaraderie, which in turn influences outgroup contempt, thus generating the context for intergroup conflict and possibly aggression (Brewer, 2001). The situation can be essentially a matter of perceptions held by each society, in which "group identification leads to exaggerated positive evaluations of the ingroup, while perceived conflict leads to exaggerated negative evaluations of the outgroup" (Jackson, 2002). Therefore, perceptions of intergroup conflict shape negative outgroup evaluations which feed into conflict between the two groups. Within the perspectives of systemic conflict and intergroup conflict, people in rivaling societies find themselves caught up in reciprocal animosity, which becomes chronic, primarily because negative psychological attitudes become reinforcing, widespread, and entrenched.

While decisions to initiate wars are clearly made by governments, the concepts of systemic conflict and intergroup conflict suggest that understanding the endurance of rivalry requires the inclusion of imperatives introduced by societal forces within rivaling polities. These imperatives may relate to several formidable issues, such as widespread antagonistic attitudes in one society towards the other society within "US" against "Them" perception, levels of support decision makers can expect to receive from constituencies when going about sustaining or resolving the conflict, and tendencies to inculcate culture of conflict within the rivaling societies. The resulting prevalent attitudes of mutual hatred and distrust can either promote militarized wars or hinder negotiated settlements, and thus contribute to sustaining long-lasting interstate conflicts.

Synthetic Conceptualization

The concepts of “protracted conflict” and “enduring rivalry” are two of the conceptual formulations used to describe long-lasting interstate conflicts. The two concepts share common features, and both have solid notional and empirical importance in the literature on international conflict. The endeavor to propose integrative conceptual descriptors for continued conflicts should consider components presented by these two concepts.

Protracted Conflict: Of immediate relevance to the theorization of systemic conflict is the concept of protracted conflict (Azar, Jureidini, and McLaurin, 1978). In fact, Azar and colleagues identify the Arab Israeli conflict as a major example of this conceptual formulation. While sharing with Rapoport the general understanding of the institutionalization and internalization of conflict by entire societies, they add that unlike customary forms of interstate conflicts, the protracted nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict has a logic that defies resolution, and thus conflict tends to last. Protracted conflicts therefore persist for several decades, as the Arab-Israeli and Indian-Pakistani conflicts illustrate.

Protracted conflicts are conceived as processes situated within social systems, as distinct from situational conflicts limited to disputes between governments. Military hostilities are recurring events within this process. Unlike exogenous conflicts in which governments, not societies, are the primary agents of conflict, protracted conflicts are endogenous, where social groups and societal forces are agents of hostility against the adversary society. Unit of analysis in the study of protracted conflicts, therefore, is the identity group, which is more relevant in understanding the dynamics of conflict and peace than nation state or the international system (Azar, 1985).

Relations between states in protracted conflict are constrained by ‘Lower Critical Threshold’ and ‘Upper Critical Threshold’, thus making movement to either war or cooperation equally serious propositions, and attempts to settle the conflict constitute a ‘crisis of cooperation’ that requires leadership creativity to handle (Azar and Cohen, 1979). Additionally, from social psychological standpoint, protracted conflicts are characterized by alienation, thus raising serious concerns for conflict management (Retzinger and Scheff, 2000). Protracted conflict is signified by frequent wars, yet conflict continues because states are unable to enforce a stable settlement of the dispute through a decisive military showdown. Analysis based on case studies from South Asia and the Middle East demonstrated that protracted conflicts involve high probabilities of war, and therefore states seek to acquire credible deterring power, including developing nuclear weapons (Khan, 2002).

Enduring Rivalry: Conceptualization of “Enduring rivalries” emphasizes the inclusion of elements of history and time in the study of interstate conflicts, and therefore represents an attempt to reduce reliance on the national attributes of belligerent states in understanding international conflict (Goertz and Diehl, 1993, p. 149). Since not all interstate rivalries are enduring, the ‘rivalry approach’ to studying war and peace expands the scope of international conflict scholarship by shifting the unit of analysis from war to rivalry and moving its context from case-selection to providing a theoretical framework (Goertz and Diehl, 1995a). The literature on enduring rivalries provides various operational methods of determining and counting cases within this specific subset of wars, and there is even a countering argument that invites greater caution in establishing the statistical criteria of observed enduring rivalry dyads (Gartzke and Simon, 1999). Generally however, enduring rivalries can be characterized as “severe and repeated conflicts between the same states over an extended period of time” (Goertz and Diehl, 1995b, pp. 32-33).

Theorization of enduring rivalries identifies three conceptual characteristics, which are ‘competitiveness’ over tangible and intangible issues; ‘temporal’ in the sense that rivalry is neither short-term nor a single-instance phenomena; and ‘spatial’, in which any given domain of enduring rivalries involves a consistent set of states (Goertz and Diehl, 1993). Obviously, territorial disputes are highly relevant causes in explaining the development of enduring rivalries (Huth, 1996; Tir and Diehl, 2002). Repeated wars between enduring rivals are influenced by a learning process, in which opponent states revise their perception of each other. Within an evolutionary perspective, early years of enduring rivalry are characterized by greater incidents of wars, while learning and changes in national capabilities contribute to reducing war incidents in latter stages of the rivalry (Maoz, 1996).

Looking at some of the intrinsic elements in protracted conflict shows that this variant of conflict involves the accumulation of costs inflicted on states entrapped by enduring rivalry, thus forming a legacy of mutual distrust and pain that can challenge conflict management, conceivably more so than in other types of international disputes (Greig, 2001). Further, in international conflicts characterized by a combination of costly competition and unresolved dispute it is relevant to consider the notion of ‘hurting stalemate’, in which belligerent states increasingly find themselves adopting pain-producing strategies that deliver little gain (Zartman, 2000). Obviously, legacies of mutual distrust and hurting stalemates constitute additional conceptual components in the theorization of enduring rivalries.

Additionally, enduring rivalries provoke widespread animosity toward the adversary state among the general public.

In this type of interstate rivalry “conflictual strategies become institutionalized and deeply ingrained in the foreign policies of the states”, and departing from rivalry status quo may require new political leadership that can bring fresh thinking into the outstanding conflict (Greig, 2001, p. 697). The institutionalization of conflict is a profound conceptual component in enduring rivalries, and it is plausible to maintain that the prevalence of mutual hostile domestic culture and the institutionalization of reciprocal antagonistic foreign policies can reinforce hurting stalemate as an unchallenged status quo.

The observation that protracted conflict defies resolution links it to the literature on enduring rivalries. Yet, surprisingly, scholarship on enduring interstate rivalry two decades ago made no direct reference to theorization of protracted conflict that had been introduced earlier. To be sure, Gary Goertz and Paul Diehl's study (1993) which contributed to constructing the concept of enduring rivalry only referred to “arms race” and “crisis” as potentially relevant concepts, thus omitting the highly relevant theoretical insights of prior scholarship on protracted conflict. Subsequent studies did not address the missing connection. At best, some studies have only indirectly linked the concept of protracted conflict to the concept of enduring rivalry, basically through relating protracted conflict to some of the other concepts that can be considered broadly akin to enduring rivalry, such as intractable conflict (Coleman, 2003; Coleman 2004; Retzinger, 2000), strategic conflict (Colaresi and Thompson, 2002), and existential conflict (Kelman, 1999).

Integrative Conceptual Descriptors of Enduring Interstate Rivalry: The two concepts of protracted conflict and enduring rivalry share important aspects. Also, each concept maintains some unique assertions that are still compatible with those of the other concept. It is therefore possible to specify an integrative conceptual approach to enduring interstate conflict gleaned from the preceding discussion. Its purpose is to capture the main notions the two concepts introduce and present a unified framework. The approach can be presented by specifying the following conceptual descriptors in table 1.

Table 1: Conceptual Descriptors of Enduring Interstate Rivalry

Descriptors	Attributes
<i>Distinguishing Observation</i>	A discernable long-lasting conflict between consistent sets of states, over persistent issues, with repeated militarized violence. Status quo is characterized by an unresolved conflict and strong likelihood of armed confrontations.
<i>Issues of Dispute</i>	Conflict is over issues of profound significance. Interests involved are vital, and the drive to pursue them constitutes a governmental priority and/or societal aspiration. Issues can be deep-rooted within the society, or government may mobilize the society behind issues of dispute in order to promote foreign policy objectives toward rival state.
<i>Agents of Conflict</i>	Societal forces and governmental institutions are involved in this type of interstate conflict. Hostility toward the other state is widespread within domestic politics. Domestic imperatives influence government's ability to manage the conflict, and therefore are taken seriously when addressing war and peace decisions.
<i>Attitudes and Mindsets</i>	Sentiments of reciprocal distrust between rivaling states are common among decision makers. Negative governmental and public predispositions toward rival state influence conflict management efforts.
<i>Strategy</i>	Decision makers adopt established conflict strategies which inform antagonistic foreign policies. Present and future crisis situations are related to previous crises. Decision makers undergo a learning process in which they update their perceptions of the opponent, possibly to the effect of reducing the likelihood of war.
<i>Legacy</i>	Rivaling societies realize the costs they continue to incur because of the conflict, generally with little concrete payoffs. Cost of conflict and slight prospect for settlement provoke feelings of pain. Lingering conflict may translate into dissatisfaction with the overall record of performance in managing rivalry.
<i>Conflict Resolution</i>	Enduring interstate conflict is exceedingly difficult to terminate through major war or negotiated settlement. Leadership determination, new thinking, and creativity are required in order to resolve the conflict.

The integrative approach accentuates the joint interpretive potentials of 'protracted conflict' and 'enduring rivalry' conceptualizations, and the seven descriptors it proposes serve as a framework to investigate the Middle East conflict. The following sections examine three conceptually-driven propositions within the context of conflict in the Middle East: the institutionalization of conflict; militarized violence; and the spatial domain of rivalry.

The Institutionalization of Conflict

Proposition 1: The persistence of enduring interstate conflict derives from attempts of domestic forces to sustain rivalry with the adversary state, and this conflict affects the domestic politics of rivaling states in ways that further prolong the conflict.

Issues of dispute in the Arab-Israeli conflict remain intractable, interests continue incompatible, and underlying antagonism persists unabated. Inter-society hostility, mutual governmental distrust, and reciprocal policy intolerance characteristic of unremitting conflicts culminated in several wars between the Arabs and the Israelis.

It is difficult to comprehend the endurance of this conflict without considering the societal context which nurtures the process that keeps both sides locked-up in inescapable rivalry. The Arab-Israeli conflict is endogenous, and therefore is institutionalized. In this sense, sources of hostility between the two sides are rooted in Arab and Israeli societies, and forces of conflict function within the domestic politics of each side. Societal effort in Israel and Arab states is devoted to aspects of the conflict. For example, options available to deal with the future of the Palestinian Occupied Territories have constituted a subject of continuous controversy within Israeli politics (Hurwitz, 1992).

Domestic Institutionalization of Conflict: The institutionalization of the Arab-Israeli conflict has resulted in the emergence of diverse forces in Arab and Israeli domestic politics, spanning the political spectrum on ideological and nationalistic positions.¹ These societal forces attempt to shape the policies of formal governmental institutions because they are interested in influencing the management of the conflict. In fact, the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 by an Israeli identifier with hard-line approaches to the Palestinian issue was an example of such societal involvement. The institutionalization of the Arab-Israel conflict also links pertinent issues to aspects of domestic politics. Analysis of the effects of domestic considerations such as party representation in the Israeli Cabinet and internal unrest in Israel and Arab states on hostile foreign policy decisions (Sprecher and DeRouen, 2005) is an example of such linkage.

While domestic institutions influence the dynamics of conflict in the Middle East, the latter also influence the former. War has influenced Israeli democratic institutions, so much so that the extreme form of Israel's proportional representation electoral system was originally adopted as a "mere temporary expedient" when Israel was at war with Arab countries in the early stage of the creation of the state of Israel. Politicians back then did not believe that rationally debating the electoral system was an immediate priority. It was therefore decided that the first election simply give the opportunity for the widest representation of Jewish opinions, and that no variant of Zionist thought be denied entry into the Knesset (Bogdanor, 1993). Additionally, divergent positions of social groups and political parties on issues pertaining to the conflict influence elections in Israel. It is therefore believed that Israel's profound security concerns have inflicted serious burden on its democracy, in ways that are not normally found in liberal democratic countries (Peri, 1993).

From the Palestinian perspective, the institutional impact of the conflict has been exceedingly heavy, to the extent of confiscating Palestinian statehood despite the fact that the Palestinians identify themselves with a recognizable nationhood. The Palestinians largely lack institutional arrangements that resemble those found in conventional states. The peace process has resulted in granting the Palestinians self-rule privileges, but conflict still persists and a proper Palestinian state has not emerged yet. While parliaments in some European countries recently symbolically voted in support of establishing a Palestinian state, the UN Security Council turned down a Palestinian draft resolution calling for ending the Israeli occupation and the creation of a Palestinian state by late 2017.ⁱⁱ

Differences among nationalist and religious forces over the struggle for the realization of national aspirations have been shaping Palestinian political affairs. The conciliatory and peaceful approach of Fatah evidently contrasts with the rejections and militant approach of Hamas movement. This is a salient institutional manifestation of the extent to which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has influenced the stateless Palestinian political community. The dispute between Fatah and Hamas along the lines of what is realistically workable and ideologically dogmatic indicates the profound institutional implications of conflict with Israel for Palestinian domestic politics.

Conflict Defies Peace Diplomacy: Enduring conflict involves two-way interactive relationships between the domestic politics of belligerent states on one hand, and conflictive interactions between states on the other. It remains to assess the relevance of this institutional property during the peace diplomacy phase, the beginning of which is marked by the Madrid Conference in 1991. The empirical evidence suggests that this property of the lingering Arab-Israeli conflict continues to hold out during the peace era.

The theoretical expectation that the Middle East peace process would provoke the active involvement of Israeli and Palestinian societal forces is supported by the attempts of orthodox Jewish political parties and Islamist groups to derail the peace process and rupture peace talks. These domestic forces refused to be reduced to mere spectators on the sidelines; instead, they became active participants in influencing the dynamics of the peace process.

A partial list of defiant Palestinian activism includes the series of deadly attacks carried out by Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements in 1994 and 1995 specifically designed to disrupt the peace process. Some of the deadliest events were two suicide bomb attacks in April 1994, one in Afula town which killed eight Israelis and wounded 44 and another in Hadera which killed five and wounded 30 people. Again, in October 1994 Hamas carried out an attack in Tel Aviv, killing 20 and wounding 48 others. Twenty Israelis were killed when a deadly explosion was set off by Palestinian suicide bombers in January 1995 at the Beit Lid junction in the central town of Nordiya. In April 1995 Palestinian militants killed six Israelis and wounded 45 others in two car bombings in the Gaza Strip. These attacks in the Occupied Territories and inside Israel attempted to threaten the peace process by weakening the leadership of President Arafat and Prime Minister Rabin, and actually managed to cause furious uproar in Israel against the continuation of peace talks with the Palestinians.

Deadly violence inflicted by extremists apparently achieves the intended objective of derailing the peace process, especially when militant extremists capitalize on the internalized animosity and mistrust between the two societies. Evidence indicated that the chances of extremists to undermine negotiated peace settlements improve significantly when militant attacks succeed to foster mistrust among moderate forces on the Palestinian and Israeli sides (Kydd and Walter, 2002).

On few rare occasions, Palestinian forces opposing the peace process showed willingness to behave on calculated cooperative notes. For instance, Palestinian militants signed a *hudna* (truce) agreement with Yasir Arafat's Palestinian Authority on June 27, 2003, according to which militants agreed to temporarily halt attacks on Israeli targets. That truce served to strengthen the leadership position of President Arafat, so that he could convey his posture as a man who could deliver on the issue of the security of Israel, as well as reflect an image of a powerful leader in Palestinian domestic politics who could influence the behavior of groups opposed to peace diplomacy. Generally, a combination of mostly defiant and scarcely cooperative involvements in the peace process demonstrates the extent to which the leadership and institutions of the Palestinian Authority have been impacted by the active participation of forces that espouse opposing visions regarding the management of conflict with Israel.

In addition, the peace process involved a psychological dimension, in the sense that it created public hopes for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and fears from the cost and shape of the resolution. Fear of the peace process actually polarized the Israeli society, and caused it to experience a serious divide after the conclusion of Oslo One Accord in 1993, to the extent that Israeli opponents of the peace process heralded a 'delegitimization' campaign against Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres (Bar-Tel and Vertzberger, 1997). Intensely aspiring to see the state of Israel united and strongly in opposition to the peace process, pragmatic Jewish settlers stood against the Oslo Accord which threatened to concede part of the "Land of Israel" to the Palestinians. Ehud Sprinzak clarifies that "[s]ince the Oslo accords were signed the pragmatists have aimed at forging an antipeace consensus that can neutralize Labor's [i.e. Rabin's] space politics. This strategy is based on the conviction that the Oslo accords are disastrous and that the Israeli public should be apprised of the dangers they pose" (Sprinzak, 2001, 70).

Jewish extremists were alarmed by the Declaration of Principles (DOP) agreement, which they viewed to challenge the national interests and religious tenets of the state of Israel. Violent opposition to the peace process resulted in the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish extremist in 1995, thus effectively halting the most diplomatically productive stage of the peace process. Subsequent Israeli governments encountered serious difficulties arising from the active involvement of societal forces in the peace process. Instances included the complications in going about transferring control over Palestinian cities to the Palestinian Authority, pulling out of Gaza in 2005, and dismantling Jewish settlements and evacuating Jewish settlers. At those critical junctures Israeli political activism was heightened, to the extent of accusing the government of treason and even calling for a Jewish Intifada.

On the other hand, the pragmatic approach of the Palestinian Authority is criticized by opposition groups for accepting to limit negotiations to the Occupied Territories, which constitute only about one-quarter of the land of Palestine. Ideological opposition groups accuse the Palestinian Authority to have betrayed Palestinians' national struggle by engaging in useless peace diplomacy, and call instead for the reaffirmation of their right to armed resistance against occupation in order to realize national independence.

Palestinian Domestic Divide: The peace process caused serious institutional consequences for Palestinian politics and resulted into domestic division. The rift between Fatah and Hamas has persisted for several years despite intervening Arab mediation efforts. Fatah and Hamas have consistently challenged one another and competed for power and popularity among the Palestinian people (Schanzer, 2003). Hamas became increasingly involved in the dynamics of the conflict. On November 11, 2004 President Arafat died after his health deteriorated significantly and Palestinian politics lost the leadership his prominence had been contributing.

Mahmoud Abbas was elected Head of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and succeeded Arafat as Palestinian President responsible for negotiations with the Israeli government.

In January 2006 Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections, and two months later formed the Palestinian government without Fatah. Although the elections were held in response to international demands for creating democratic Palestinian institutions, the violent history of Hamas and its rejectionist stances prompted Israel, the United States, and the Europeans to denounce the outcome.ⁱⁱⁱ In June 2007 Hamas took complete control of the Gaza Strip,^{iv} and became the *de facto* government for nearly 1.8 million Palestinians, while Fatah's Palestinian Authority retained control in the West Bank.

These major developments activated the domestic institutional dimension of the conflict during recent stages of peace diplomacy. The absence of a strong Palestinian leadership caused by the death of Arafat, the escalation of Hamas' challenge to the conciliatory approach adopted by Fatah, and the secession of Gaza under the unilateral control of Hamas dramatically exposed the institutional polarization of Palestinian domestic politics.

While President Mahmoud Abbas of Fatah favors pursuing peaceful settlement with Israel through negotiated political compromise, the defecting Chief of Government Ismael Haniyeh of Hamas rejects conciliation with Israel and heralds resistance instead. The situation represents a major institutional rift in Palestinian politics that exacerbates the shortcomings already inflicting the pseudo state Palestinian polity created through Oslo One and Oslo Two accords in 1993 and 1995, respectively.

The Palestinian domestic political conflict became intensely dangerous and internal cohesion increasingly precarious. Palestinian politics became effectively split into two polities. Violent infightings broke out between Fatah and Hamas militants, killing hundreds of Palestinians. The dispute between the two sides has been persisting for eight years, and Palestinian civil war was feared at some junctures. The Saudis, Egyptians and Qatari intervened with mediation diplomacy, but repeatedly failed to bring about Palestinian rapprochement.

Fatah and Hamas reached a reconciliation deal in April 2014,^v and proceeded to form a Palestinian Unity Government in June, amid concerns over the implications of the deal between the two rivaling factions for peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu stated during a security cabinet meeting that President Mahmoud Abbas "said yes to terrorism and no to peace"^{vi}, hence halting peace diplomacy with the Palestinians.

To summarize, governments of states involved in enduring rivalry are not permitted comfortable leverage over how conflict and peace decisions are managed. Discussion in this section shows that Israeli and Palestinian societal forces have influenced governmental peace policies, and that conflict has influenced domestic politics in ways that have further complicated peace efforts.

Militarized Violence

Proposition 2: Persistence of enduring rivalry creates the potential for military interactions to involve non-governmental domestic actors as primary agents in war dyads.

Wars are recurrent events within enduring interstate rivalry, essentially because of the inability of belligerent states to enforce a decisive termination of conflict. Wars in lingering conflicts fail to produce a victorious side that can enforce its policy preferences on the defeated side. The resulting context, therefore, continues to engender future militarized violence and, overall, the Arab-Israeli wars validate this characterization.

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Israeli government carried out incursions into Palestinian cities in the Occupied Territories. Israel claimed that the military campaign was in the context of war on terrorism that signified the United States' response to 9/11 attacks. The government of Ariel Sharon administered Operation Defensive Shield against Ramallah, Qalqilya, Tulkarem, Bethlehem, Jenin, and Nablus in April 2002. The Battle of Jenin and the Nablus Casbah battle claimed the lives of 54 and 78 Palestinians, respectively (Rees, Gosh, Hamad, 2002). The United Nations Secretary General Kofi Anan directed that a fact-finding commission visit the West Bank, but the Israeli government denied the international envoy access to the area and the commission never performed its task. Three months later, the Israeli government carried out a targeted killing operation in Gaza to hunt down Hamas military commander Salah Shehada. An aircraft bomb was dropped on a housing block in *Hai al-Daraj*, thus killing eighteen civilians.

In addition to violence in terms of incursions into Palestinian cities and targeted killings, three major wars provide evidence in relation the war component of unremitting conflict.

Israel-Hezbollah War. The first case concerns the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006. An incursion into Israeli borders by Hezbollah militias resulted in killing eight Israeli soldiers and taking two hostages. Israel retaliated through a massive military attack on Southern Lebanon on July 12, in declaration of war on Hezbollah paramilitary forces.

The war lasted for 34 days, and resulted in the death of over 1,125 Lebanese people and the displacement of hundreds of thousands others. On the Israeli side, 119 soldiers and 40 civilians were killed. The fighting was intense, and a report issued by Human Rights Watch accused Israel of using air strikes indiscriminately thus resulting in the high number of casualties among civilians. Israel responded by insisting that Hezbollah used civilians as human shields, thus leading to Israel's inability to distinguish between combatants and civilians.^{vii} The war ended through a ceasefire brokered by the United Nations, and the UN Security Council issued resolution 1701 on August 11, 2006, which was approved by the Israeli and Lebanese governments. The war officially ended three days later, but Israel-Hezbollah belligerence has the potential of engendering future military conflicts. Both Israel and Hezbollah have improved their military capabilities since 2006 in preparation for likely future outright military conflicts that might devolve from the escalation of small-scale violent exchanges (White, 2015).

Israel-Hamas War in 2008: Less than thirty months after its war on Hezbollah in Lebanon, Israel launched a second war, this time on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The war began in late December 2008 and ended two days before the inauguration of the Presidency of Barack Obama in January 2009. During the three weeks of hostilities, Israeli forces administered massive air and ground attacks on Gaza. Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni justified the war in terms of Israel's efforts to fight the terror dangers Hamas had been posing to Israel ever since the pullout from Gaza in 2005. Through utilizing George Bush's "with us or against us" language to pool international support for the military campaign against Gaza, the Israeli government portrayed the war as the only option available to confront Hamas rocket attacks against Israeli targets and destroy militants' infrastructure.

The Israeli government called the war on Gaza "Operation Cast Lead", in which around 1,440 Palestinians were killed. This figure accounted for about 75 percent of the total number of Palestinians killed during the year 2008 in the Occupied Territories, reflecting the serious human cost of the war.^{viii} The fact that the military attack was coupled with the Israeli-enforced closure of Gaza indicates the troubling extent of the humanitarian crisis which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians experienced during the three-week military campaign. The Israeli war on Gaza was the result of months of preparation, and so was the diplomatic campaign designed to allay world concerns over the human casualties among Palestinian civilians. Dan Gillerman, Israeli ambassador to the UN until a few months before the military assault on Gaza stated that "This was something that was planned long ahead... I was recruited by the foreign minister to coordinate Israel's efforts and I have never seen all parts of a very complex machinery—whether it is the Foreign Ministry, the Defense Ministry, the prime minister's office, the police or the army—work in such coordination, being effective in sending out the message".^{ix}

The war ended through a unilateral Israeli cease-fire, amidst widespread doubts over the success of the war in dismantling Hamas powerbase in Gaza. Investigations were carried out to look into claims over Israel's use of excessive force against Palestinian civilians during the war, including the practice of firing white phosphorous shells over areas that did not qualify as military targets.

The Fifty-Day War in 2014: Military conflict broke out between Israel and Hamas again in 2014, when both sides went to a war that lasted fifty days, from July 7 to August 26. The war is described as the most devastating military attack on Gaza (Filiu, 2014), which resulted in killing 2,139 Palestinians, destroying around 20,000 homes, and displacing 500,000 people. On the Israeli side, 64 soldiers and 6 civilians were killed.^x

The 2014 war reflects yet another episode of belligerence between Israel and Hamas, which started with increased rocket attacks launched by Hamas militants targeting Israeli civilian places, and escalated to an Israeli large-scale military offensive on Gaza. Israel's proclaimed objectives of the war included demolishing networks of underground tunnels on Israel-Gaza borders that Hamas could use to stream militants into Israeli destinations, and obliterate Hamas rocket-launching capabilities. During the war Hamas made a set of demands as conditions for accepting a ceasefire, which included, among other things, getting a seaport and an airport, the release of Palestinian prisoners, and Qatari and Turkish mediations (Rubenstein, 2015).

An open-ended peace deal mediated by Egypt managed to stop the war. The interim deal introduced some immediate measures, like handing over the operations of Gaza's borders from Hamas to the Palestinian Authority, facilitating the flow of goods into Gaza, launching an internationally-funded reconstruction efforts in Gaza, allowing the Palestinians greater farm land access, and extending fishing limits off Gaza's coast.^{xi}

The deal left both sides far short of achieving the objectives they had specified at the beginning of the war, and the fact that the fundamental issues that prompted the war had been deferred for future arrangements reduces the deal to a mere truce. Hamas and Israel incurred serious human and political costs that made both of them willing to accept the open-ended deal as an exit strategy. Neither Israel nor Hamas could claim winning the war, and the fact that their main objectives have not been achieved can only be seen to spawn renewed motivations for future militarized encounters.

The military campaigns launched on Palestinian cities in the West Bank, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and twice on Hamas in Gaza empirically validate the idea that the Arab-Israeli conflict continues to challenge peace diplomacy.

More than two decades of peace diplomacy did not avert the occurrence of additional wars in the Middle East. The three war events go counter to the tenets and purposes of peace, and they corroborate the militarized violence component of the enduring rivalry between the Arabs and Israelis.

Increased involvement of domestic non-governmental actors in unremitting interstate conflict can directly entangle them in wars with rival states. Both Hezbollah and Hamas represent salient non-state actors in the dynamics of the Middle East conflict, and their increased involvement in the conflict prompted Israel to squarely handle them as war enemies.

To summarize, the analytical merits of incorporating societal actors in the study of enduring interstate conflict should be evidenced by the fact that the three most recent major wars in the region involved non-governmental groups. Israel's wars against Hezbollah in 2006 and Hamas in 2008 and 2014 targeted actors within Lebanese and Palestinian domestic politics, respectively. The Lebanese government and Palestinian Authority were neither directly involved nor threatened during these wars, hence substantiating the inclusion of societal rivalry in the study of enduring conflict.

Additionally, the three wars ended exactly the way conceptually suggested by enduring rivalry conceptualization. The wars of 2006, 2008, and 2014 ended without clear winners or stable equilibriums. The conflict, therefore, is far from being terminated and future military hostilities loom as real possibility.

The Spatial Domain of Rivalry

Proposition 3: Set of rivaling states may change overtime. The persistence of enduring conflict over several decades introduces the possibility of geographically expanding the scope of rivalry to include additional states in the domain of enduring rivalry.

Iran-Israel Conflict: Rivalry between Israel and Iran has expanded the Middle East conflict to engage a non-Arab state. Iran and Israel used to have close ties during the Shah Pahlavi rule, but out of recognizing the centrality of the Palestinian question to Middle Eastern politics the Shah provided a degree of diplomatic support to the Palestinian cause (Cooley, 1979). Iranian-Israeli relations were however severed after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Although many dogmatic aspects of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy subsequently adjusted to political realities, Iran's hostility to Israel continues unchanged (Menashri, 2006). Iran's direct entanglement in the Middle East conflict is increasingly evident through certain structural and behavioral considerations.

These include the existence of a theocratic fundamentalist regime in Tehran, the inflammatory stances of the hardline government of the previous President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad toward the state of Israel, the expressively power-based regional ambitions of the Iranian government, and Israel's declared retention of the option of preemptive military attacks against Iranian Nuclear sites. Also, much to the disapproval of Israel and the United States, the government of Iran repeatedly identifies with the Palestinians' national cause, strongly rejects the Middle East peace process, overtly supports Hezbollah's militancy against Israeli interests, and actively supports violence adopted by Hamas against Israel.

Iran's involvement in the Middle East conflict is real and connotes disturbing war threats in the region. Iranian leaders have established opposition to American interests and hostility against Israel as pillars of the state (Lindsay and Takeyh, 2010). The Iranian government makes no secret of its rejection of Israel's claims to nationhood, and President Ahmadinejad expressed confidence in the demise of the State of Israel. The Israeli government identifies Iran as its foremost enemy in the region, and is equally blunt in venting its worries over the dangers Iranian policies level at the security of Israel. In some respects, Israeli war against Hezbollah can be seen as a proxy war with Iran.

Issues of conflict, attitudinal belligerency, and temporal persistence attributes qualify the Iran-Israel conflict to fit the enduring rivalry conceptualization. The conflict between Iran and Israel has been lingering for decades, and therefore Tehran is highly motivated to acquire nuclear capabilities in order to counterbalance the nuclear weapons Israel is widely believed to possess. Iran's drive to acquire nuclear capabilities even after the demise of Iraq as a regional foe can be explained by its rivalry to Israel, thus creating serious concerns over regional nuclear weapons proliferation (Khan, 2010).

In a possible scenario of regrettable miscalculations armed conflict between Israel and Iran would not altogether remain a remote possibility. An estimate predicted that the Syrian crisis, suspicions over Tehran's intentions to build nuclear weapons, and the effects the U.S. presidential elections could have on supporting Israel's militarily actions against Iran would made war between Iran and Israel an imminent possibility in 2012 (Arbour, 2011). Generally, therefore, departure from recurring wars in the Middle East is still unattainable.

Turkey-Israel Tension: Turkey recognized the State of Israel on March 28, 1949, only ten months after the Israeli Declaration of Independence, making it the first Muslim country to recognize the new Jewish state.

In the aftermath of the Gulf War in 1991 Ankara decided to pursue active roles in the Middle East, and needed to have greater leverage in handling the Kurdish issue and managing problematic relations with Syria. Alliance with Israel therefore appeared as Turkey's viable strategic option (Sayari, 1997). In 1996 Turkey and Israel signed an agreement of military cooperation at levels that had the potential of evolving into a military alliance (Kibaroglu, 2002). The alliance represented a unique development in the region in the sense that it involved a Jewish and Muslim state, amidst serious worries expressed by Arab countries (Bengio and Özcan, 2001).

Nonetheless, Turkish-Israeli relations are a mixed bag. On the cooperation side, both Turkey and Israel adopt democratic forms of government, are strategically oriented toward the West, and their economic and military capabilities provide potential for partnership in maintaining regional stability. Areas of conflict include Turkish public sympathy with the Palestinian cause, the rise of political Islam in Turkish politics, and the pressure regional powers apply on Turkey to curb cooperation with Israel. Additionally, Israel's possible recognition of the Kurd's national aspirations and Armenian genocide may threaten the alliance between the two countries (Burris, 2003).

Turkey's ruling Islamist Justice and Development Party strongly sympathizes with the Palestinians' national goals and human sufferings. Prime Minister Erdoğan accused Israel of committing more serious war crimes during war in Gaza in 2008 than those Sudan's government had been accused of inflicting in Darfur.^{xii} In the event that Ankara manages to move toward increased alignment with the Arab and Muslim countries, relations with Israel may be placed on a confrontation path.

The growing tensions between Turkey and Israel in the aftermath of the Gaza flotilla raid on May 31, 2010 caused Turkey-Israel relations to deteriorate. That violent confrontation over the economic blockade of the Gaza Strip resulted in killing nine human activists onboard *Mavi Marmara* ship. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan strongly condemned the attack, described Israel's action as state terrorism, and labeled Israel as the primary threat to peace in the region. Erdoğan maintained that the raid on Gaza flotilla was against international law, and portrayed Israel's action as a cause of war to which his country was ready to go if necessary.^{xiii} Israel's refusal to apologize and pay compensations for raiding the Gaza flotilla exacerbated the tension. In September 2011 Turkey expelled Israel's ambassador and cut military relations with what was once an important ally (Friedman and Fraser, 2011). The diplomatic war between the two countries implied the failure of the Obama Administration to prevent the escalation of the tension, as well as inability to repair the ensuing damage in relations between the two main allies of the US in the Middle East (Barkey, 2011).

Although alliances are expected to disintegrate once their objectives expire, the fact that the keen strategic cooperation Israel had had with both Iran and Turkey degenerated into serious conflicts indicates the damage enduring rivalry can cause to regional peace. Awkwardly, the Arab-Israeli conflict continues unresolved and two cases of interstate rivalry have emerged. Possibility of war resulting from these additional cases is real, although it is more probable in the case of the apparently existential Iran-Israel conflict.

To summarize, the two cases of Iran-Israel conflict and Turkey-Israel tension discussed in this section demonstrate that conflict in the Middle East has expanded geographically. Israel once had close relations with Iran and Turkey, but the unyielding conflict in the Middle East seems to have contaminated those arrangements. Since the two cases of conflict involve considerable dimensions of the Palestinian issue, one can argue that failure to resolve the lingering Palestinian problem has caused the Middle East conflict to engender additional cases of interstate conflict.

From a conceptual standpoint, the spatial domain of the unremitting Middle East conflict has expanded to include additional sets of rivaling dyads. This observation implies that the domain of enduring interstate rivalry involves the potential of changing overtime plausibly through generating additional rivalry dyads.

Conclusions

The integrative approach this paper proposes is encouraged by the multiplicity of concepts used for lingering interstate conflicts. The objective is not to challenge any of the concepts posited by the literature; rather it is to pull together the defining essences of available concepts in order to specify conceptual descriptors that synthesize the societal and international dimensions of enduring rivalry. These conceptual descriptors are useful for generating and evaluating theoretical propositions that help interpret facts and events in connection to enduring conflicts.

Empirical assessments of the three theoretical propositions within the context of conflict in the Middle East confirm the attributes of the integrative conceptual descriptors of enduring interstate rivalry proposed by this paper. The analysis also perceives that while enduring interstate rivalry can persist for several decades, it is by no means dormant. The interpretation of events pertaining to conflict in the Middle East shows that enduring rivalry involves important aspects of dynamism that encompasses national and international politics: distressing political interactions within the domestic politics of rivaling societies, war events that involve non-state actors, and geographic expansion of rivalry to include additional conflict dyads. Unfortunately, all three aspects of dynamism contribute to making conflict in the Middle East more complex than is already suggested by the basic Palestinian problem.

As a result of the complicating consequences implied by the three propositions this paper has discussed, peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict is increasingly difficult to achieve. Palestinian domestic political divide, growing influence of Hezbollah and Hamas after going to war with Israel, and evolving Iran-Israel rivalry and Turkey-Israel contention make the resolution of the Middle East conflict more difficult to realize.

The observation that the description of the Middle East conflict as enduring continues to be operational has serious implications. Saying that conflict in the Middle East remains essentially unremitting despite more than two decades of peace diplomacy connotes real possibilities for recurring violence in the form of interstate wars, civil unrests, and acts of terrorism. Also, unremitting conflict implies complications introduced by the interference of non-state forces designed to influence the management of conflict and peace. Further, conflict in the Middle East has geographically transcended the Arab-Israeli scope to involve long-term Iran-Israel and Turkey-Israel rivalries, and therefore is now more complex than ever. Clearly, such complications gravely baffle efforts of negotiating peace settlements and implementing reconciliation policies.

Enduring rivalry normally involves a legacy of painful costs, and more than twenty years of futile Middle East peace diplomacy risks turning unremitting conflict into a legacy of squandered opportunities for settling the conflict. Additionally, lingering conflict amounts to a hurting stalemate in which rivaling sides find themselves locked up in a pain-producing strategy that produces little gain. Peace diplomacy that fails to safeguard against damage caused by the interference of societal forces in peace efforts, fails to prevent the direct meddling of nongovernmental actors in militarized violence, and fails to avert the geographic expansion of conflict certainly makes departure from the hurting stalemate entrapment increasingly difficult.

ⁱFor details on the positions of Palestinian domestic forces see Rex Brynen. 1994. "The Palestinians and Confidence Building Measures in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: The implications of statelessness," in *Confidence Building Measures in the Middle East*, Gabriel Ben-Dor and David Dewitt, eds. Boulder: Westview Press. For the positions of Israeli forces see Alan Dowty chapter, "Confidence and Security Building: The Israeli Domestic Dimension", in the same book.

ⁱⁱ<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/31/us-mideast-palestinians-un-idUSKBN0K81CR20141231>

ⁱⁱⁱ<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/palestine/pa-elections2006.htm>

^{iv}<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/jun/15/israel4>

^v<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27128902>

^{vi}<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/02/palestinian-unity-government-sworn-in-fatah-hamas>

^{vii}[http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/.](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/)

^{viii}http://worldrefugeesurvey.org/index.php?title=Israeli_Occupied_Territories.

^{ix}"Why Israel Went to War in Gaza", <http://www.guradian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/04/israel-gaza-hamas-hidden-agenda>.

^x<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israelgaza-conflict-50day-war-by-numbers-9693310.html>

^{xi}<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/middle-east-unrest/whats-interim-gaza-peace-deal-between-israel-hamas-n189841>

^{xii} "Turkey PM: Israel War Crimes Worse Than Sudan". Haaretz. August 11, 2009. Accessed January 9, 2012. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/turkey-pm-israel-war-crimes-worse-than-sudan-1.4547>

^{xiii} "Turkey Voices Readiness for Israel War". Press TV, September 22, 2011. Accessed January 9, 2012. <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/200630.html>

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