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Triadic Deterrence: Coercing Strength, Beaten by Weakness

BOAZ ATZILI AND WENDY PEARLMAN

*Triadic deterrence is the situation when one state uses threats and/or punishments against another state to coerce it to prevent non-state actors from conducting attacks from its territory. Under what conditions is triadic deterrence successful? Some attribute outcomes to the balance of power between states. By contrast, we argue that the complex asymmetrical structure of this conflict requires attention to the targeted regime's relationship to its own society. The stronger the targeted regime, the more likely deterrent action will prove effective. Moving against non-state actors requires institutional capacity, domestic legitimacy, and territorial control, which only strong regimes are able to furnish. Whereas strong regimes can act to uphold *raison d'état*, weak regimes lack the political tools and incentives to undertake controversial decisions and enforce them. We illustrate this argument through analysis of between- and within-case variation in Israel's attempts to deter Palestinian groups operating from Egypt between 1949 and 1979, and from Syria since 1963.*

Some of the most pressing conflicts in the international system today involve a state, a non-state actor, and a state perceived to aid, abet, or host the non-state actor's use of violence. Such complex relations underlie confrontations

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as diverse as the US war in Afghanistan to destroy al Qaeda, Israel's strikes on Lebanon to fight Hezbollah, and India's warnings against Pakistan in response to the actions of Kashmiri separatists. In such cases—which we call *triadic deterrence*—one state uses punishments and/or threats against another state to deter it from supporting a non-state actor, if not to compel it to stop assisting it.

When does deterrence of host states succeed? We argue that the stronger the targeted regime, institutionally and politically, the more likely deterrent steps can coerce it to act against non-state actors that use violence across state borders. Such action requires institutional competencies, domestic political legitimacy, and territorial control. All are factors crucially shaped by regime strength. In applying military pressure, the deterring state seeks to convince a host state of the costs of continued enabling of insurgent attacks. However, the host state can only reach and act upon this calculation of costs and benefits if it enjoys the centralized authority to make coherent policy on the basis of national security. In weak and divided governmental structures, competing domestic interests trump *raison d'état*. Attempted deterrence thus does not have the intended results, regardless of the military power that it projects.

This argument fills a gap in the literature on deterrence, which does not typically consider triadic deterrence as possessing its own strategic logic. We demonstrate this claim by using process-tracing to analyze two cases of Israeli retaliation against Arab states in an effort to prevent violence by Palestinian groups: Israeli action against Egypt from 1949 to 1979, and Syria since 1963. This case selection offers variation both between and within cases. In addition, it holds constant the deterring state and the non-state actor, allowing us to focus on the strength of the targeted regimes. While the contours of our empirical material may be familiar to students of the Middle East, our explanation identifies a conjunction of variables that goes untheorized in standard histories. At the same time, our analysis goes beyond large-*n* tests by offering detailed insight into the multiple actors and motivations involved.

This article proceeds in five sections. The first explores our theory of triadic deterrence as a new addition to literature on deterrence. The second briefly describes Israel's deterrence policy. The third and fourth outline our cases and the fifth concludes.

TRIADIC DETERRENCE

Deterrence is designed to discourage “the enemy from taking military action by posing for him the prospect of cost and risk outweighing his prospective gain.”¹ The concept became prominent during the Cold War's standoff,²

¹ Glenn Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 14–16.

² Bernard Brody, “Implications for Military Policy,” in *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order*, ed. Bernard Brody (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946); Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (New

when scholars debated various formulations of conventional deterrence,³ nuclear deterrence,⁴ and direct versus extended deterrence.⁵ While some conclude that the end of the Cold War rendered deterrence theory irrelevant,⁶ others argue that it need only be adapted to new security threats. In this regard, T. V. Paul highlights five types of “complex deterrence” in the contemporary era: deterrence among great powers, deterrence among new nuclear states, deterrence involving states with chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, deterrence between states and non-state actors, and deterrence by collective actors such as NATO.⁷

We identify deterrence of states that host violent transnational non-state actors as meriting its own place in this typology. Traditional works on deterrence miss state/host-state/insurgent triads due to their focus on interstate standoffs. The new wave of deterrence literature is likewise either silent about these strategic situations,⁸ or mentions their possibility without elaboration.⁹ Notable works that theorize deterrence in the twenty-first century, such as those by Patrick Morgan or Lawrence Freedman, make no mention of challenges akin to triadic deterrence.¹⁰ Works on terrorism and insurgency come closer to considering these situations. Some analysts argue that violence by non-state actors cannot be deterred directly because such actors are motivated by extremist ideologies and thus do not share “the common knowledge” of costs and benefits that are presumed to guide states.¹¹

York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1–41; Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*; Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); and Daryl Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 80–141.

³ John Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Avner Yaniv, *Deterrence Without the Bomb: The Politics of Israeli Strategy* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987).

⁴ Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*; and Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospects of Armageddon* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁵ See, for example, Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, “What Makes Deterrence Work? Cases from 1900 to 1980,” *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (July 1984): 496–526.

⁶ Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2004), 1.

⁷ T. V. Paul, “Complex Deterrence: An Introduction,” in *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, eds., T. V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1–27. For deterrence in intra-state ethnic conflict, see Stephen M. Saideman and Marie-Joelle Zahar, “Causing Security, Reducing Fear: Deterring Intra-State Violence and Assuring Government Restraint,” in *Intra-State Conflicts, Governments, and Security: Dilemmas of Deterrence and Assurance*, eds., Stephen M. Saideman and Marie-Joelle Zahar (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁸ Paul, “Complex Deterrence.”

⁹ Amir Lupovici, “The Emerging Fourth Wave of Deterrence Theory—Toward a New Research Agenda,” *International Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (September 2010): 705–32; and Jeffrey W. Knopf, “The Fourth Wave in Deterrence Research,” *Contemporary Security Policy* 31, no. 1 (April 2010).

¹⁰ Morgan, *Deterrence Now*; and Freedman, *Deterrence*.

¹¹ Emanuel Adler, “Complex Deterrence in the Asymmetric-Warfare Era,” in *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, eds., T. V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 85–108; Janice Gross Stein, “Rational Deterrence Against ‘Irrational’ Adversaries? No Common Knowledge,” in *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age*, eds., T. V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 58–82; and Paul K. Davis

Moreover, non-state actors are well-positioned to withstand conventional retaliation due to their small size, secretive structures, and the lack of “return address” against which the actors that deter can retaliate.¹² Nevertheless, violence-using groups frequently look to states for material support and safe haven, just as those states use those groups to advance their own agendas.¹³ Analysts give keen attention to this relationship and generally agree that a principal way to fight violent non-state actors is to deter the states from which they operate or obtain support.¹⁴ Nevertheless, there is little scholarly analysis of how such deterrence actually functions in practice, or under what conditions it succeeds, fails, backfires, or proves irrelevant.

Does the process of coercing a state to forgo support for violence by a non-state actor differ from that of coercing it to forgo its own violence? Most existing studies assume that the logic underlying triadic deterrence is the same as that of state-to-state deterrence. After all, in targeting host states, the target state seeks to shift the terms of deterrence from the bewildering terrain of asymmetric warfare to more straightforward, interstate parameters. Like all states, the targeted host seeks to protect its sovereignty and territory. States might absorb heavy costs when their core national interests are at stake, but they are unlikely to do so for the interests of non-state actors. By directing retaliation against the host, the deterring state hence recasts the strategic interaction as a contest between two states that share instrumental rationality. In such situations, success is determined by balance of power. The stronger the deterring state is relative to the targeted state, the greater its likelihood of coercing it, granting that it communicates its resolve clearly.

We challenge this seemingly unproblematic application of the logic of state-to-state deterrence to triadic deterrence. The latter is distinct because it blends deterrence, which seeks to persuade an adversary not to take a certain action, and compellence, which tries to coerce an adversary to stop taking an unwanted action or to begin taking a wanted action.¹⁵ Compellence demands a more proactive stance from the targeted state than does deterrence, and

and Brian Michael Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism: A Component in the War on al Qaeda* (Santa Barbara, CA: Rand, 2002), 4.

¹² Richard M. Betts, “The Soft Underbelly of American Primacy: Tactical Advantages of Terror,” *Political Science Quarterly* 117, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 31.

¹³ Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat* (New York: Random House, 2006); and Idean Salehyan, *Rebels Without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

¹⁴ Knopf, “The Fourth Wave,” 11; also see Robert F. Trager and Dessislava P. Zagorcheva, “Deterring Terrorism: It Can be Done,” *International Security* 30, no. 3 (Winter 2005/06): 87–123; Boaz Ganor, *The Counter-Terrorism Puzzle: A Guide for Decision Makers* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 2007), 81–82; Neil J. Smelser and Faith Mitchell, ed., *Discouraging Terrorism: Some Implications of 9/11, National Research Council Study* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2002); and Betts, “The Soft Underbelly of American Primacy.”

¹⁵ Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, chap. 2.

is hence arguably more difficult to achieve.¹⁶ It also forces the host state to play two games simultaneously. On one level, the host state must defend itself against threats and retaliation by the deterring state. On another level, it must change its policy toward the non-state actor in its midst. While the former game is symmetric, the latter is asymmetric. This hybridity entails variables beyond the host state's military or economic power vis-à-vis other states. In contrast to traditional formulations of deterrence, it points to the relevance of the host state's political and institutional power with respect to social forces within its own borders.

We build on research on the influence of domestic politics, and in particular domestic structures, on state action in the inter-state arena. For example, Michael Mastanduno, David Lake, and John Ikenberry consider states' relative autonomy from society and on that basis deduce what strategies they are likely to pursue internationally.¹⁷ Steven David suggests a theory of "omni-balancing," in which state weakness makes domestic threats loom larger than external dangers in the alliance decision calculus of leaders.¹⁸ Many studies on insurgency examine how a state's internal strength affects its relations to violent non-state actors. Weak states appear to provide fertile ground for rebel groups, in general, and transnational insurgents, in particular.¹⁹ Strong states are less likely to see violent non-state actors form roots in their territory. They are also more capable of uprooting them, should they do so. Whether led by a foreign power or by the host state itself, counterinsurgency is prone to fail when the host state lacks the institutional capacity to offer the services and security that win the population over from the fighters.²⁰ For all of these reasons, weak states are more likely than strong ones to be host to insurgent groups. Such hosting in turn increases the probability that those states will become embroiled in militarized disputes with other states.²¹ These findings help explain hostilities involving non-state actors, the states

¹⁶ Morgan, *Deterrence Now*, 2–3; Gary Schaub Jr., "Compellence: Resurrecting the Concept," in *Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Lawrence Freedman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Michael Mastanduno, David A. Lake, and G. John Ikenberry, "Toward a Realist Theory of State Action," *International Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (December 1989): 457–74.

¹⁸ Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (January 1991): 233–56.

¹⁹ James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (February 2003): 75–90; Sarah K. Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); James Piazza, "Incubators of Terror: Do Failed and Failing States Promote Transnational Terrorism?" *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (2008): 469–88; Idean Salehyan, *Rebels Without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); and Boaz Atzili, "State Weakness and 'Vacuum of Power' in Lebanon," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 33, no. 8 (August 2010): 757–82.

²⁰ David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 146–61; and Daniel Byman, "Friends Like These: Counterinsurgency and the War on Terrorism," *International Security* 31, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 95–99.

²¹ Salehyan, *Rebels Without Borders*; and Kenneth A. Schultz, "War as an Enforcement Problem: Interstate Conflict Over Rebel Support in Civil Wars," *International Organization* 64, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 281–312.

that they target, and the weak states that host them. Still, they leave us to wonder under what conditions the use of threats and punishments against host states is most effective.

Addressing these gaps in the study of deterrence, insurgency, and international relations more broadly, we offer a causal story that includes three elements: state A's deterrence strategy, non-state actor B's behavior, and host state C's regime strength. We argue that triadic deterrence is more likely to succeed when C's regime is strong. When it is weak, deterrence is likely to fail. Following Michael Mann's concept of "infrastructural power," we view state strength as the state's institutional capability to exercise control and implement policy choices within the territory it claims to govern.²² Regime strength refers to both the extent of that institutional capability and the extent to which governing elites possess the political power to mobilize and direct it. A strong state is a prerequisite for a strong regime. To be strong, a regime must also possess centralization of authority, which it acquires through popular legitimacy, elite cohesion, and/or the effective institutionalization of procedures for regulating inter-elite conflict and enforcing executive decision making. Centralization enables a strong regime to harness state resources and thereby carry out such tasks as extracting revenue, providing public goods, and maintaining order.²³

Deterrence theory holds that, to be effective, the deterring state must enjoy power preeminence and credibility, and clearly communicate its intentions.²⁴ Nevertheless, the deterring actor's capacity to project military power, make credible threats, and establish clear redlines cannot alone explain the outcomes of triadic deterrence. Even the mightiest of strikes will not compel a host state to change its behavior when that state lacks the material and political capacity to implement that which the compeller demands.

Host state regime strength is a necessary condition for deterrent success for three reasons. First, restraining non-state actors, or compelling them to discontinue their attacks, requires institutional competencies. Strong regimes possess greater capacity to make and enforce policy choices because they exercise control over military and police forces, a judicial system, and other state apparatuses. Should deterrent threats persuade the regime to restrict

²² Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Volume 2: The Rise of Classes and nation States 1760-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Also see Hillel Soifer and Matthais vom Hau, "Unpacking the Strength of the State: The Utility of State Infrastructural Power," *Studies in Comparative Institutional Development* 43, no. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2008): 219-30.

²³ See Boaz Atzili, "When Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors: Fixed Borders, State Weakness, and International Conflict," *International Security* 31, no. 3 (2006/2007): 139-73; Boaz Atzili, *Good Fences Bad Neighbors: Border Fixity and International Conflict* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); and Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, War, and the State of War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19-40. Note that this definition does not preclude strong federal regimes.

²⁴ *Snyder, Deterrence and Defense*. For studies that challenge this formula, see Huth and Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work?"; and Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Rational Deterrence Theory: I Think, Therefore I Deter," *World Politics* 41, no. 2 (January 1989): 208-24.

non-state challengers, it is therefore able to do so. By contrast, states with weak regimes lack the institutional tools to implement decisions made by the political center. In such situations, deterrent threats and retaliatory strikes are unlikely to be effective. Rather, they may be irrelevant because they will not affect the host state's political or physical ability to act against the non-state actor. Alternatively, they may be counterproductive if they further degrade the host state's infrastructural power and political legitimacy and thus encourage its inaction or even its support of the non-state actor.²⁵

Second, restraining a non-state challenger entails domestic costs because these groups often enjoy the support of segments of the host state's population. This may be especially true where the state itself enjoys little legitimacy. Host states thus often face two contradictory threats: a military threat from the outside that pressures it to block the non-state challenger, and a political threat from the inside that pressures it to support the non-state challenger. The stronger the regime, the more the external threat will outweigh the internal one, and deterrence will succeed.

Third, non-state actors seek operational autonomy. In strong regimes, uncompromised sovereignty limits the freedom of any force to contradict what decision-makers regard as state interests. Under a weak regime, by contrast, ineffective state institutions and a fragile support base grant non-state actors the physical and logistical space to establish headquarters, store and transport weapons, train cadres, and plan and execute attacks. Weak regimes not only help non-state actors avoid restraints, but also grant them new opportunities. In regimes characterized by inter-elite rivalries rather than a cohesive government, competing political aspirants often form alliances with non-state actors to harness their political popularity or military power. Non-state actors extract benefits from the regime's internal conflicts. To the degree that some motives for aiding non-state actors are internal, deterrent strikes are likely to be irrelevant. When they exacerbate such tensions, they can even backfire.

The sum of these factors leaves a weak regime virtually unable to advance its *raison d'état*. Rather, individual decision-makers opt for securing their political futures by avoiding costly confrontations with non-state actors. The host state's desire to avert losses in the inter-state realm dictates one course of action, but regime survival vis-à-vis internal social forces advises another. In weak regimes, the latter set of imperatives takes precedence. Janice Gross Stein observes similar dynamics in state-to-state deterrence when domestic political vulnerabilities limit decision-makers' strategic options.²⁶

²⁵ These concepts build on Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Deterrence: The Elusive Dependent Variable," *World Politics* 42, no. 3 (April 1990): 336–69; and Janice Gross Stein, "Deterrence and Reassurance," in *Behavior, Society and Nuclear War*, vol. 2, eds., Philip Tetlock et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 13–17.

²⁶ Stein, "Deterrence and Reassurance," 17–20.

They are even more pronounced in triadic deterrence, however, due to their mixing of deterrence and compellence. Under those conditions, the regime must not only restrain its own action but also roll back the non-state actor's activity. This double task cannot be fulfilled without political legitimacy and institutional capacity.

Some might identify potential causal endogeneity in this analysis. If deterrence in fact provides weak regimes with incentives to build institutions and centralize political control, it may resolve the problem of triadic deterrence over time. Faced with threats to vital security concerns, host regimes may overcome complacency and muster the authority to confront reckless groups. In addition, deterrent strikes might bring fractured host societies to rally round the flag. Elites and masses will hence resolve their internal conflicts and forge the unity to thwart imminent dangers. This reasoning is plausible, but falls short because it confuses the increased patriotism and solidarity that nations experience under violent threat with deeper forms of political consolidation. As Lewis Coser argues, external conflict tends to unite a group, yet whether it also results in centralization depends on both the group's preexisting degree of consensus and the nature of the conflict.²⁷

This suggests two points for triadic deterrence. First, we must understand the internal structure and politics of a host regime prior to the onset of deterrent conflicts to understand how it is likely to react when such conflict ensues.²⁸ Regimes that do not cross at least some threshold of legitimacy and institutional capacity are unlikely to be able to use deterrent threats to create them. Second, different kinds of conflict have different likelihoods of impelling a regime to centralize or a nation to unify. Recent research suggests that external threats that are non-territorial in nature have less effect on state building than do territorial threats.²⁹ In cases of triadic deterrence, the territory of the host state typically is not on the line. Temporary occupation might be implied, but the threat imposed by non-state actors is typically not severe enough to propel states to territorial annexation, which is the only type of threat likely to induce robust state building. Our argument might have a problem of endogeneity if deterrence tended to strengthen that host's regime. For the two reasons outlined here, however, deterrence is unlikely to have this effect.

In gauging the effect of regime strength, another variable deserves consideration: the host state's interests in non-state violence. This variable is important yet insufficient to explain deterrent outcomes. There is no doubt

²⁷ Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1956), 92.

²⁸ For a similar argument applied to non-state actors, see Theodore McLauchlin and Wendy Pearlman, "Out-group Conflict, In-group Unity? Exploring the Effect of Repression on Movement Fragmentation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (February 2012): 41–66.

²⁹ Atzili, *Good Fences Bad Neighbors*; and Douglas M. Gibler, "Outside-In: The Effects of External Threat on State Centralization," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no. 4 (August 2010): 519–42.

that host states differ in the degree to which they share interests with non-state actors on their soil and in whether they wish to control them. An exclusive focus on this factor, however, leads analysts to assume that deterrence succeeds more when it pushes regime goals further from those of the non-state actor. We agree that, holding regime strength constant, deterrence is more successful when a host state opposes the non-state actor and more prone to fail when it supports it. Yet regime strength is rarely invariable. As our cases show, deterrence is unlikely to succeed, and in fact is liable to backfire, when applied against weak regimes, regardless of their support for the non-state actor or lack thereof.

ISRAELI DETERRENCE

At the heart of Israel's collective perception is a sense of struggle against a hostile environment: It sees itself as "a small island in an Arab sea" whose existence is constantly threatened. When it finds itself with "no choice" but to fight wars,³⁰ Israel seeks clear and rapid victory in blitzkrieg operations that transfer hostilities to enemy territory. The desire to avoid such wars, however, has brought military planners to place great emphasis on deterrence.

In the long term, Israel aims for "cumulative deterrence" to persuade Arab states that they cannot defeat Israel and thus must recognize it and make peace.³¹ In the short term, it tends to undertake "deterrence by punishment."³² Should adversaries harm Israelis, harsh reprisals are necessary to remind them that Israel does not surrender to violence. These reprisals were initially aimed at the communities from which infiltrators originated. Since the 1953 Qibya raid, however, the target more commonly became enemy states and their institutions and infrastructure.³³

Whether confronting a threat from states, non-state actors, or states that host such non-state actors, Israel has typically invoked the same deterrent strategy: threats and retaliation designed to force the adversary to change its calculations of the costs and benefits of defiance. It has sought to "speak loudly and periodically use a big stick,"³⁴ while paying little attention to Arab

³⁰ Martin van Creveld, *The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israeli Defense Forces* (New York: Public Affairs, 1998), 125; and Efraim Inbar, "The 'No Choice War' Debate in Israel," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 1989): 22–37.

³¹ Uri Bar-Joseph, "Variation on a Theme: The Conceptualization of Deterrence in Israeli Strategic Thinking," *Security Studies* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 145–81; Doron Almog, "Cumulative Deterrence and the War on Terrorism," *Parameters* 34, no. 4 (Winter 2004/2005): 4–19; and Zeev Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of Israel's Security & Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 15–16.

³² Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*.

³³ Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land*, 235–36; and Van Creveld, *The Sword and the Olive*, 133.

³⁴ Shmuel Bar, "Deterring Terrorists: What Israel Has Learned," *Policy Review* 149 (June–July 2008):

regimes' domestic political circumstances, in general, and their institutional capacity, in particular. This runs counter to the basic logic of strategic interaction, which implies that states tailor their operations to different sources of military threat. When it considered internal factors, it was only with the aim of accentuating regimes' weakness vis-à-vis Israel. This strategy has been remarkably constant over time and insensitive to the nature and origins of the challenge to be deterred. As General Israel Tal remarked, "Israel's military thought is little more than a series of footnotes to the doctrine which crystallized in the fifties."³⁵

Academic analyses of the Israeli case have likewise given insufficient attention to differences among violent challengers. Avner Yaniv and Jonathan Shimshoni, for instance, conflate deterrence of low-level conflict by the Arab armies with insurgent attacks by Palestinian actors.³⁶ They thus fail to distinguish between the two as parties with divergent interests, no less to shine light on how their interactions condition deterrence success. Benny Morris and other historians make this distinction, yet do not theorize causal patterns.³⁷ Making this his aim, Zeev Maoz attributes varying outcomes of Israel's policy to the country's aversion to risk in the realm of peacemaking as opposed to its acceptance of risk in the use of limited force.³⁸ Nonetheless, he focuses on Israel's decision making to the neglect of the nature of the adversary against which it fights. He hence effectively considers only one-third of an irreducibly triadic deterrent equation.

Other scholars give more attention to the Arab side of the Israeli deterrence equation. Some note, as we do, that deterrence frequently falters when it targets regimes that do not control all military activity conducted from their territory.³⁹ Uri Bar-Joseph makes this observation, yet does not differentiate between regimes' external military might and their internal political and institutional strength. He thus misses the opportunity to analyze internal weakness as a variable that can cause deterrence to be irrelevant or counterproductive regardless of external power.⁴⁰ No study of Israeli security to date has conceptualized the regime strength of the targeted states as a variable, traced its variance, or evaluated predictions for how different levels of regime strength affect deterrence outcomes. This is the gap our study seeks to fill.

³⁵ Cited in Ariel E. Levite, *Offense and Defense in Israeli Military Doctrine* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 25.

³⁶ Yaniv, *Deterrence Without the Bomb*; and Jonathan Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1953 to 1979* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

³⁷ Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949–1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³⁸ Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land*.

³⁹ For example, Amos Malka, "Israel and Asymmetrical Deterrence," *Comparative Strategy* 27, no. 1 (January/February 2008): 1–19; and Bar-Joseph, "Variation on a Theme."

⁴⁰ Bar-Joseph, "Variation on a Theme."

EGYPT 1949–79

During its first three decades of statehood, Israel employed a policy of threats and retaliation against Egypt to deter Palestinian infiltration and attacks from the Gaza Strip. As long as Egypt's regime was weak, Israel's actions did not stop this cross-border activity. After the 1956 Suez War, a more stable regime in Cairo was the condition that allowed Israel's increased military capabilities to have a deterrent effect. This situation continued to hold until Israel and Egypt signed a peace agreement in 1979, which formally ended hostilities and thus the status quo of a deterrent standoff.

1948–56

During the 1948 War, about two hundred thousand Palestinians found refuge in the poor and overcrowded Gaza Strip, which came under Egypt's de facto authority. In the years that followed, thousands of Palestinians illicitly crossed the border from Egypt into Israel. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) recorded five thousand such infiltrations in 1955 alone.⁴¹ The vast majority were refugees attempting to cultivate their former fields, visit family members, or engage in minor theft. With time, infiltrations became more politically motivated, with infiltrators carrying out killings or sabotage against Israelis.⁴² Violent incidents with nationalistic motives emanated from Egyptian-controlled territory at a rate of about 20 to 40 per year from 1949–52 and 50 to 60 per year from 1953–56.⁴³ Israeli civilian casualties from attacks amounted to 26 in 1953, 50 in 1954, and 192 in 1955.⁴⁴

Israel's policy toward these incidents was fairly consistent in nature, though varied in intensity. From 1950 to 1956, Israel sought to deter infiltrations by carrying out punishing military strikes against Gaza residents and Egyptian forces and by threatening to escalate if infiltrations did not cease.⁴⁵ Israel's deterrence policy was manifest in both retaliation raids and the threats that accompanied them. Israel launched its first retaliation raid on the Gaza Strip in October 1950, and continued with eleven small-scale raids throughout 1951. It reduced raids following the 1952 Free Officers revolution, yet renewed them through 1953–54. To retaliate for an increase of armed infiltration, for example, the IDF conducted a raid into Gaza in January 1953, which left five Palestinians dead. In August of the same year, the newly

⁴¹ Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 28–68.

⁴³ Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land*, 55; and Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence*, 43, 119 reports more than a hundred incidents annually between 1954 and 1956.

⁴⁴ Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence*, 37. The number might be higher because origins of some attacks are unknown.

⁴⁵ Michael B. Oren, "Escalation to Suez: The Egypt-Israel Border War, 1949–1956," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 2 (April 1989): 349.

created IDF special forces Unit 101 attacked a refugee camp at Al-Burayj, resulting in 20 Palestinians dead. Israel carried out other raids on the strip in July 1954. In August, it launched “Operation an Eye for an Eye” on a military post near Khan Younis, killing ten Egyptian soldiers.⁴⁶ Whether aimed at the civilian population or military installations, Israel’s aim was deterrence through punishment. General Moshe Dayan explained: “When Israeli forces operated inside Arab territory without the local army’s being able seriously to challenge them, the Arab military failure was openly demonstrated to their own people. Thus, instead of raising the prestige or the Arab regimes, the end result of fedayun [sic] action was to shake popular trust in them and in their armed forces.”⁴⁷

Israel augmented the raids by delivering threats publicly and through diplomatic channels. In clandestine low-level talks in 1954, for instance, Israeli Prime Minister Moshe Sharet warned Egypt of Israeli retaliation.⁴⁸ Israeli military units often left leaflets cautioning against further violations of the border.⁴⁹ There is thus little chance that Egypt could have failed to understand Israel’s demand that it cease aiding or abetting Palestinian infiltration from the Gaza Strip. Even before the Gaza raid, Israel demonstrated this intent so clearly that the us State Department expressed its concern.⁵⁰

Egypt got the message. In coordination talks on management of the border, Egyptian officers repeatedly told their Israeli counterparts that they were doing their utmost to stem infiltrations. After a Palestinian raid on an Israeli bus in the Negev desert killed eleven, Egypt secretly appealed to Israel to avoid retaliation.⁵¹ From 1953–55 Cairo implemented various measures to impede violations of the border, including arresting infiltrators and imprisoning them for increasingly long sentences. It also pressured village leaders to reveal the names of infiltrators, withheld food aid from suspects, erected watch towers, and eventually ordered troops to “shoot to kill” in response to movements in border areas after dusk.⁵² In late 1954 alone, Egyptian authorities arrested and severely sentenced two hundred Gazan activists as punishment for cross-border attacks.⁵³ Nevertheless, Egypt was unable to make its preferred policy effective on the ground. In consequence,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 351–57; Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars*, 312–16; and Barry M. Blechman, “The Consequences of Israeli Reprisals: An Assessment” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, Washington, DC, 1971), 64–80. Blechman puts the date of the first raid at June 1950.

⁴⁷ Moshe Dayan, *Diary of the Sinai Campaign*, trans. George Weidenfeld (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 9.

⁴⁸ Oren, “Escalation to Suez,” 355.

⁴⁹ Blechman, “The Consequences of Israeli Reprisals,” 76.

⁵⁰ “Hatzofeh Defends Reprisals Against Arabs,” as cited in Foreign Broadcast Information Service–Foreign Radio Broadcast, (US State Department documents), 54–176, 10 September 1954.

⁵¹ Oren, “Escalation to Suez,” 370.

⁵² Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars*, 84–91; and Oren, “Escalation to Suez,” 370.

⁵³ Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949–1993* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 62.

there was no significant reduction in infiltrations.⁵⁴ The number of attacks by Palestinians in Israel, and likewise their result in Israeli fatalities, remained virtually constant from 1949 to 1953. It increased in 1953–54.⁵⁵

Israel's attempts at deterrence before 1955 failed despite the fact that Egypt had no vital interests in Palestinians' infiltrations. Israel's threats were both exceedingly clear and absolutely central to Egypt's relations with Israel.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Egypt lacked the institutional and political capacity to control the border. Colonial policies and the corrupt, fraught rule of King Farouk left the Egypt of the early 1950s with a weak state and regime. Lacking a popular or political power base and legitimacy, it had difficulty adopting controversial policies. Even when it did, state institutions were too feeble to execute them. Moreover, the Egyptian army was physically weak. Until 1953, no more than a single infantry company was stationed in the Gaza Strip.⁵⁷ Exacerbating this state of affairs was extreme government instability. Four governments collapsed in the first half of 1952 alone. Political factions competed with each other by adopting more and more aggressive stances on the Palestine question.⁵⁸ This only further eroded the ability of the army to act against violations of the border with Israel. The sum of this regime weakness made it virtually impossible for Egypt to comply with Israel's intended deterrence. Michael Oren concludes, "Though Egypt's official policy in the strip was to stop infiltration, lest it elicit an armed Israeli response for which the Egyptian army was not prepared, strong measures to block all infiltrators proved to be *politically as well as physically* impossible" [emphasis added].⁵⁹

In 1952, the young military "Free Officers" ousted King Farouk. They established the Revolutionary Command Council as the country's highest authority and chose General Mohamed Naguib as prime minister. However, the Free Officers' power base did not extend much beyond the army and was thus insufficient for ruling over the population for the long run. Taking the helm in 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser gradually consolidated his power through creation of a single dominant party that would serve as a mechanism for mobilization and control. He initiated land reforms to create a constituency in the largely agrarian society while also breaking the power of wealthy landowners. This neutralized a potential threat to the regime. Nonetheless, the regime's penetration of society remained minimal before 1956, and political opposition was significant.⁶⁰ The Muslim Brotherhood

⁵⁴ Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, 86–87.

⁵⁵ Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land*, 54–55.

⁵⁶ Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, 85.

⁵⁷ Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence*, 74.

⁵⁸ Oren, "Escalation to Suez," 351–52.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁶⁰ Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 181–205.

criticized Nasser vociferously and even made a failed attempt on his life in 1954.

Regime weakness in Cairo was expressed in its inability, physical and political, to stop infiltrations from Gaza. Given the limitations of state institutions, policy decided in Cairo was often not implemented, or implemented only ineffectively, in Gaza. Nasser's primary political concern was economic development and social reforms, and he did not wish to divert resources from these projects to the conflict with Israel. Nor did he want Palestinians to seize the agenda by unilaterally instigating their own "small war" through acts of infiltration. Nonetheless, Nasser's attempts to halt infiltrations met with little success. As Israeli Military Intelligence concluded in 1954, "The Egyptian Army generally makes efforts to prevent infiltration . . . but . . . the authorities' line is not carried out."⁶¹

This came to the fore in Egypt's beleaguered efforts to avert Israeli reprisals by monitoring the border. The 1949 armistice agreement prevented Egypt from introducing large units of its regular army into the Gaza Strip. As a substitute, it created a new paramilitary formation, the Border Police, in 1952. Later renamed the Palestine Borders Guard, it was a Palestinian force under Egyptian supervision. The goals of this force were twofold. Egypt sought, on the one hand, to neutralize Palestinian agitation, and on the other hand, to thwart actions that would provoke Israeli strikes.⁶² Yet the guard failed to curb infiltrations. On the contrary, it sometimes even aided them. In a July 1954 memorandum, Egypt's chief of intelligence in Gaza noted that while "the main purpose of placing armed forces along the armistice line is to prevent infiltration . . . entrusting Palestinian soldiers with this task will not further that aim, because they encourage infiltration and repeatedly conduct attacks."⁶³ Furthermore, he argued that inclusion of Palestinians in the guard gave Israel justification for retaliatory strikes.⁶⁴ Dayan likewise admitted that Egypt's failure to stop infiltrations was due to a lack of capacity, not interest. In 1953 he stated, "The problems along the border with Egypt are not the fruits of Egyptian Government plots but a fruit of its neglect, especially in the Gaza Strip area, where Egyptian rule is weak and the refugee problem is going from bad to worse."⁶⁵ The Egyptian regime wanted to uphold *raison d'état*, but did not wield the institutional strength that this demanded.

Neither did it possess the requisite political legitimacy and support base. Nasser did not yet command the deference of people in Cairo and the Arab world, let alone in Gaza. He thus hesitated to take controversial and

⁶¹ Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, 92.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 89–90.

⁶³ Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 61–62; see also Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, 89–90.

⁶⁴ Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, 89–90.

⁶⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, 85.

unpopular steps towards fulfilling Israel's demand that he seal their shared border. Oren notes, "Nasser was unsuccessful in exercising control over his border units . . . in the face of a spate of domestic crises."⁶⁶ These crises included an intensifying conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood and economic stagnation. Egypt's Gross National Product (GNP) fell by 10 million Egyptian pounds between 1952 and 1953. Given a burgeoning population, GNP per capita remained flat even as growth recovered slightly from 1954–56.⁶⁷ The regime's precarious political position made it impossible for Nasser, as for Farouk and Naguib before him, to clamp down on border activity.⁶⁸ Israeli attempts at deterrence and compellence were rendered irrelevant because Egypt was simply unable—politically and physically—to respond in the way Israel wished.

Such was the political backdrop when, in February 1955, the border situation escalated significantly. Responding to a string of attacks by Palestinians, the IDF raided an Egyptian military base in Gaza, killing thirty-six Egyptian and Palestinian soldiers and two civilians. Israel's goal was deterrence: it sought to punish and warn Egypt to end all border violations, once and for all. Yet the raid had the contrary effect. Salah Khalaf (also known as Abu Iyad), a founder of the Fatah movement and himself a Gaza refugee, recalled:

The Israeli raid on Gaza . . . gave rise to a surge of anger among Palestinians, indignant at the Egyptian army's passivity and inability to defend the population or counterattack on the same scale. Throngs of demonstrators swarmed through the streets of Gaza demanding arms. Palestinian students in Cairo organized strikes and demonstrations, publicly calling for the downfall of the regime.⁶⁹

According to Khalaf, students presented Nasser with several demands, including "obligatory military training for Palestinians to enable them to defend themselves." Nasser hesitated but then promised to comply.⁷⁰ Why did the Egyptian president consent to this escalatory gesture in defiance of Israeli deterrence? The explosion of grassroots protest struck Nasser when his political position was particularly precarious. At home, he was entangled in a power struggle with his predecessor, Naguib. In the Middle East, Nasser's leadership was being challenged by the Baghdad Pact, an anti-Soviet treaty sponsored by the United States and Britain, which was signed the very month

⁶⁶ Oren, *Escalation to Suez*, 344.

⁶⁷ Patrick O'Brien, *The Revolution in Egypt's Economic System: from Private Enterprise to Socialism, 1952–1965* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 336.

⁶⁸ Oren, "Escalation to Suez," 354; and Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 61.

⁶⁹ Salah Khalaf with Eric Rouleau, *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle*, trans. Linda Butler Koseoglu (New York: Times Books, 1981), 22.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

of the Gaza raid. The pact, including Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan—but not Egypt—enhanced Iraq’s military capability and claims for regional leadership while undermining Egypt’s own bid.⁷¹

Nasser understood that Israel, in striking Gaza, was trying to compel him to stop non-state actors. He also understood the consequences of failing to comply.⁷² Nonetheless facing a combination of popular pressure and a tentative grip on political power, Nasser felt compelled to defy Israeli deterrence. Even the commander of the UN peacekeeping observer forces in the area acknowledged that this was the case.⁷³ Nasser thus undertook a new policy of escalation. He ordered a dramatic increase of military forces to the strip, which directly instigated border clashes including mining, shelling, and ambushing Israeli patrols. In addition, Egypt activated a new military unit called the *fedayeen*, a commando adjunct to the Egyptian army. Manned by Palestinians from Gaza, they were trained by Egyptian officers with the aim of infiltrating and attacking Israel.⁷⁴ This initiative resulted in immediate hostilities, including a fedayeen raid on an Israeli wedding in March 1956, twelve Israeli citizens killed in one week that April, and an exchange of artillery blows on the border.⁷⁵

Israel ratcheted up its retaliations as well. During 1955–56, it executed at least nine raids on Egyptian military installations, including an assault in Khan Younis that resulted in thirty-five Egyptian dead and another one on Gaza city that killed fifty-nine.⁷⁶ In addition, Israel continued issuing belligerent threats. In 1955, the IDF spokesman declared: “It should be clear that if the Egyptian authorities in Gaza continue in their games, and to the previous sin of failing to stop the infiltration add the crime of instigating provocative operations, they will create a ‘complication’ that Israel does not desire. Responsibility for such development will lie with them.”⁷⁷

Yet once again, Israel’s retaliations and threats failed to coerce its adversary to behave as it wished. Until February 1955, Israel’s attempts at deterrence against Egypt as a state hosting non-state actors were irrelevant because the regime lacked the institutional capacity and legitimacy to comply with them. Between the 1955 Gaza Raid and the Suez War, Israeli retaliation was not simply irrelevant for Egypt’s relationship to infiltrations. It was outright counterproductive, as it goaded Egypt to undertake new initiatives

⁷¹ Avraham Sela, *The Decline of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Middle East Politics and the Quest for Regional Order* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 43; and David Tal, “The 1956 Sinai War: A Watershed in the History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” in *Reassessing Suez 1956: New Perspectives on the Crisis and its Aftermath*, ed. Simon T. Smith (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 142–43.

⁷² Tal, “The 1956 Sinai War,” 142–43.

⁷³ Blechman, “The Consequences of Israeli Reprisals,” 88.

⁷⁴ Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars*, 91; Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 63–65; and Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence*, 81–82.

⁷⁵ Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence*, 82.

⁷⁶ Blechman, “The Consequences of Israeli Reprisals,” 88.

⁷⁷ Cited in Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence*, 81.

in assisting and organizing Palestinians in their cross-border infiltrations and attacks.

1956–79

In 1956, Israel joined Britain and France in instigating a war to return the Suez Canal to British control. During the war, Israel occupied the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula for six months. Its goal was to topple Nasser's regime, to gain additional territory or, at the very least, to coerce a peace agreement with Egypt. It did not join the Suez "collusion" to deter cross-border attacks by non-state actors. Yet the war contributed to precisely this effect. From 1956 to June 1967, the Israeli-Egyptian border was relatively peaceful. Infiltrations from Gaza decreased dramatically and only a few politically motivated attacks were registered.⁷⁸ This change took place without any formal agreement between Israel and Egypt or any significant change in the harsh conditions endured by Palestinian refugees.

Israeli deterrence of Egypt succeeded due to two factors. The first was Israel's enhanced projection of military strength. Israel's ability to seize the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula through a blitzkrieg operation established the credibility of its military threats. Though it did not end Egypt's hopes of someday eliminating Israel, it sent a clear message that Egypt was not yet capable of doing so. Consequently, in speech after speech, Nasser declared that Arabs would strike to erase the humiliation of 1948 and avenge the conspiracy of 1956—but not before the time was right. He thereby acknowledged that Egypt was unready to undertake such a feat and that he would not allow Palestinian infiltrations from Gaza to drag it into premature war.

The perceived increase in Israel's power and credibility was important. Yet it is insufficient to explain the outcome in this case. It would not have resulted in deterrence success were it not accompanied by a change in Nasser's own domestic and institutional power. The second factor leading to reduction of Palestinian infiltrations was therefore the increased stature, popularity, and strength of the Egyptian regime. For Egypt, the Suez War was a military loss, but a political victory. It bolstered Nasser by distinguishing him as the paramount leader of the Arab world. Arab publics hailed Nasser as a brave leader who fought a three-pronged attack by imperialist powers and even forced their withdrawal.⁷⁹ The transformation of Nasser's regional status gave him more room to maneuver and less need to justify his policies, including those related to the Palestine question. To be sure, other Arab

⁷⁸ Mordechai Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza: Israel's Road to Suez and Back, 1955–1957* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1994), 321; Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence*, 120; and Yaniv, *Deterrence Without the Bomb*, 97–98.

⁷⁹ Michael N. Barnett, *Confronting the Costs of War: Military Power, State, and Society in Egypt and Israel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 93–94.

leaders opposed Nasser's hegemonic tendencies. Yet, they were constrained by his immense popularity among their own populations, if not developing countries at large.

Nasser's revitalized prestige enhanced his domestic political power as well. It increased his leverage and marginalized would-be critics. Emboldened, Nasser embarked on a major reconstruction of Egypt's economy. The result was growth in both per capita income and GNP, the latter rising by 8.7 percent in 1963–64.⁸⁰ In addition, Nasser nationalized banks, insurance companies, and commercial agencies, carried out comprehensive land reform, and expanded state-run enterprises. These developments, in Michael Barnett's words, "transferred power to a growing and ever-powerful state bureaucracy that was accountable primarily to Nasser."⁸¹ By the 1960s, the Egyptian regime was vastly stronger than its former self.

During its brief occupation of Gaza, Israel carried out massive arrests and executions that effectively broke the fedayeen contingent. Some may have expected Egypt to reestablish the force after Israel's withdrawal, but it did not. Far from it, Nasser took active steps to prevent Palestinians from reestablishing the fedayeen themselves.⁸² In the Gaza Strip, he authorized the deployment of only a police force, not military forces, to avoid unnecessary clashes with Israel. Egypt reestablished the Palestinian Border Guards, but only in the heart of the Sinai Peninsula, far from the Israeli border. Stationed in Sinai, the guard served little purpose beyond offering Palestinian youth jobs and an outlet for their frustration. It played no role in aiding infiltration into Israel, as before the Suez War.⁸³ Nasser's changed stance is testimony to Egypt's strengthened regime, which was newly determined and able to prevent the cycle of infiltrations and reprisal raids dominant through 1956.

Palestinians, meanwhile, were increasingly impatient with the stalemate with Israel. They hence formed some forty clandestine groups from 1959 to 1963.⁸⁴ In Beirut in 1956, George Habbash and Wadi Haddad founded the Arab Nationalists Movement (ANM) to call for Arab unity and the liberation of Palestine. At the University of Cairo, Yasir Arafat argued that Palestinians should not rely on Arab states but instead wage their own guerrilla war to liberate their homeland. Arafat and others formalized their group as the Palestine Liberation Movement or Fatah. This revival of an independent Palestinian national movement, as well as challenges by the new Ba'athist

⁸⁰ Robert Marbo, *The Egyptian Economy, 1952–1972* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 168; O'Brien, *The Revolution in Egypt's Economic System*, 336; and John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 210.

⁸¹ Barnett, *Confronting the Costs of War*, 95.

⁸² Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence*, 120.

⁸³ Yezid Sayigh, "Escalation or Containment? Egypt and the Palestinian Liberation Army, 1964–1967," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 30, no. 1 (February 1998): 98.

⁸⁴ Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 238.

regimes in Baghdad and Damascus, pressured Nasser to live up to his own rhetoric about defying the Jewish state.

Still, Nasser remained cautious. He walked a tightrope between appearing to lead Arab commitment to Palestine on the one hand, and doing everything possible to prevent non-state military activity on the other. With these twin goals, he led the 1964 Arab Summit in authorizing Ahmed Shuqayri, the Arab League's Palestinian delegate, to establish an entity to represent the Palestinian people. With this mandate, Shuqayri, a personal devotee of Nasser, founded the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Nasser arguably sought a mechanism that would satisfy some Palestinian demands yet contain them within the bounds of Egyptian interests.⁸⁵ The fact that he granted the PLO a base in Cairo, as well as institutional and monetary support, solidified his sway over it. Nasser wielded similar influence over the ANM, which deferred to Egypt's wish to avoid military engagement with Israel.

Along similar lines, Nasser acquiesced to the creation of the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA) as the PLO's military wing, but went to lengths to co-opt it. He also limited its operational autonomy by basing the PLA in the Sinai Desert and Gaza Strip so that his agents could control its development and maneuvers. Furthermore, he demanded that the PLA be integrated into the Unified Arab Command, the Arab League's military coordination mechanism led by Egypt's chief of staff. Egypt therefore refused to give Palestinian commanders meaningful authority over either military operations or the day-to-day functioning of PLA units.⁸⁶ Beyond this, Nasser debilitated the PLA by ensuring that it received armaments that were outdated, of dubious quality, and limited in supply.⁸⁷ He restricted the PLA's numbers by curtailing the number of Palestinians from outside Egypt allowed to join.⁸⁸ Against Palestinians' appeals, Nasser also refused to institute mandatory enlistment of Gazans. He did so out of fear that a large Palestinian force would instigate strikes on Israel.⁸⁹ As Yezid Sayigh summarizes, "The Egyptian command strove consistently to deny the PLA the means to provoke Israel, directly and indirectly, and in that manner sought to contain the potentially destabilizing force."⁹⁰

Egypt was thus committed to blocking the PLO, PLA, or ANM from acting as non-state engines of hostilities against Israel. The same motivations drove it to impose strong restrictions on Fatah, which was not deferent to Nasser

⁸⁵ Wendy Pearlman, "The Palestinian National Movement and the 1967 War," in *June 1967: The Crisis and Its Consequences*, eds., Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 126–148.

⁸⁶ Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 98–106.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 106–7.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 98–106; and Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 67–70.

⁸⁹ Moshe Shemesh, *Arab Politics, Palestinian Nationalism and the Six Day War: The Crystallization of Arab Strategy and Nasir's Descent to War, 1957–1957* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 12.

⁹⁰ Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 98.

personally, ideologically, economically, or strategically. Fatah thus posed a threat to state interests that the president, at last wielding strong control of a powerful security apparatus, would not tolerate. This clash of interests came to the fore when Fatah carried out its first attack on northern Israel on New Year's Day 1965. In doing so, it launched the Palestinian fedayeen, a term that thenceforth came to refer to non-state guerrillas. In the years that followed, Fatah carried out dozens of attacks from Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, including bombing pipelines, water pumps, warehouses, and power plants, as well as planting landmines on roads, highways, and railroad tracks.

Egypt, however, was vigilant in stopping Fatah from launching attacks from its borders. It gathered intelligence on Fatah, detained its members, and hampered its activities.⁹¹ Nasser accused Fatah of trying to drag him into war and discredited it by alternatively suggesting that it was a front for the Muslim Brotherhood, a proxy of Saudi Arabia, and an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Under Nasser's leadership, Arab Summit meetings denounced guerrilla actions on the grounds that they would provoke retaliation. Nasser's hostile stance toward Fatah diminished somewhat as the organization came to attract popular support throughout the Arab world. Nevertheless, Egypt continued to oppose Fatah attacks across its own border, as well as to monitor Fatah supporters and activists in Egypt.⁹² While Nasser was content to see Israel retaliate against Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, he did not allow Fatah or the PLA to give Israel the excuse to do the same against Egypt.⁹³

Targeted against Egypt's strong regime, therefore, Israel's efforts at triadic deterrence proved effective. They continued to do so after the 1967 war. Despite the defeat, Nasser's political legitimacy held, as demonstrated by the tens of thousands of Egyptians who went into the streets to implore him not to resign. This personal stature empowered him to determine state interests, which now moved further from the liberation of Palestine and instead concentrated on Egypt's desire to recover the Sinai Peninsula from Israel. From 1967 to 1970, Egypt engaged in a "War of Attrition" across the Suez, but prohibited Palestinian non-state actors from launching attacks from Egyptian soil. After Nasser's death, Anwar Sadat inherited the strong state institutions that Nasser had built. This enabled Egypt to continue to bar Palestinian action through such tumultuous events as another war with Israel in 1973, Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977, the subsequent negotiations with Israel, and the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1979. Successful triadic deterrence aided the path to peace. The peace treaty, in turn, made deterrence recede from the forefront of the strategic relationship between Israel and Egypt.

⁹¹ Shemesh, *Arab Politics, Palestinian Nationalism and the Six Day War*, 96.

⁹² Moshe Shemesh, "The Fida'iyyun Organization's Contribution to the Descent to the Six-Day War," *Israel Studies* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 10; and Shemesh, *Arab Politics, Palestinian Nationalism and the Six Day War*, 99–101.

⁹³ Pearlman, "The Palestinian National Movement and the 1967 War."

In summary, we distinguish between two periods in Israel's attempts to deter Egypt from aiding or abetting Palestinians' operations against Israel. The first saw gradual escalation of Israeli military action. Egypt exerted considerable effort to restrict border violations. Nonetheless, the regime in Cairo enjoyed neither the institutional capability nor the political support to stop non-state activity from its territory. Under those circumstances, Israeli deterrence was irrelevant and then it became counterproductive, propelling an escalatory environment in which infiltrations and attacks only increased. The second period witnessed a shift in state and regime strength that ushered in a concomitant shift in deterrence outcomes. Nasser's resounding political victory in the Suez War, along with the sweeping domestic reforms he instituted thereafter, gave his regime the strength it previously lacked. At the same time, Israel's demonstrated military capabilities increased Nasser's incentives to avoid conflict, at least in the short term. The result was a striking change: during the years 1956–67, the border between Israel and Egypt, and in particular that along the Gaza Strip, was relatively quiet. Conventional inter-state fighting resumed in the years that followed, but never again would Egypt allow non-state actors to attack Israel from its territory.

The IDF's favorable balance of power versus Egypt was a necessary component in deterrence, yet it was not sufficient to make it effective. Before the 1955 Gaza raid, Egypt was not unwilling to affect Palestinian infiltration, but unable to do so due to the regime's domestic crises and overall institutional weakness. Between 1955 and the Suez War, the same internal problems drove Nasser to support infiltrations, even though doing so meant goading an adversary with greater military might. Suez transformed this dynamic because it was a turning point in both regime strength and deterrence outcomes. In its aftermath, Israel no longer needed to issue explicit threats to Egypt. Nasser was well aware of Israeli raids in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, where infiltrations continued. Unlike before the war, however, he was capable of using his new political and institutional power to curb the non-state actor in Egypt's midst. He was both deterred from aiding the fedayeen and compelled to take active steps to prevent their attacks of Israel. This shift would not have been possible if not for the significant increase in the strength of the regime in Cairo.

SYRIA SINCE 1963

As in Egypt, Israeli-Syrian military engagement in the late 1960s demonstrates how triadic deterrence becomes more effective as a regime grows stronger. From 1963–70, Israeli strikes had little deterrent effect on a Ba'ath regime beleaguered by economic crisis, social unrest, and inter-elite divisions. Yet as this regime consolidated institutionally and politically, particularly under

Hafez al-Assad, Syria became both more willing and more able to restrict Palestinian guerrilla forces.

1963–70

Upon achieving independence from France in 1946 and being unsettled by defeat in the 1948 War, Syria entered a period characterized by state weakness and recurrent military coups. Between 1949 and 1966, nine Syrian governments were overthrown by force. The collapse of Syria's three-year union with Egypt, the United Arab Republic, again provoked instability. In 1963, a coup brought a heterogeneous coalition to power. Within this junta, the Ba'ath Party, a revolutionary movement committed to Arab nationalism, unity, and socialism, established dominance by forcibly eliminating its rivals. Nevertheless, the Ba'ath regime was no stronger than the short-lived governments it replaced. The radical young officers who took charge in Damascus were, in Patrick Seale's words, "a military splinter group of a semi-defunct party without a popular base."⁹⁴ This group inherited weak governmental institutions and made them even more vacuous by sweeping purges of personnel.

Apart from conflict at home, Syria's new leadership found itself in conflict with Israel. It vigorously opposed Israel's penetration of demilitarized zones on the Syrian border as well as Israel's diversion of water from the Jordan River. In addition, Syria's Ba'ath regime declared commitment to the liberation of Palestine and supported the armed struggle of emerging Palestinian groups, most notably Fatah. During an era in which Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt thwarted the fedayeen, Syria became their most important state ally. As Hafiz al-Assad reportedly quipped, "It was in Syria that the lungs of the Resistance were filled with oxygen."⁹⁵ Before Fatah's 1965 debut operation, sympathetic officers in the Syrian military, among them Assad, allowed Fatah to use training camps in Syria.⁹⁶ Thereafter, the regime offered commandos training and arms. It permitted Fatah to organize on Syrian soil, distribute its newspaper, transport weapons, and receive shipments through its borders.⁹⁷ Syrian media publicized Fatah's announcements and lauded its exploits.

Militancy against Israel was rooted both in national grievances and the Ba'ath ideology, which emphasized popular liberation. Yet Syria's support for Palestinian guerrillas was not determined by ideology or interests alone. It was also profoundly conditioned by the weakness of its regime and state. In the Egyptian case, institutional weakness reduced the government's capacity

⁹⁴ Patrick Seale, *Assad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 85.

⁹⁵ Cited in *ibid.*, 124.

⁹⁶ Khalaf, *My Home, My Land*, 42.

⁹⁷ Shemesh, *Arab Politics, Palestinian Nationalism and the Six Day War*, 103–4.

to restrict the fedayeen. In Syria, weakness played the additional role of increasing incentives and opportunities for supporting guerrilla activity. It did so in three ways.

First, the regime's weakness vis-à-vis its own society led Ba'athist officers to champion the fedayeen in the hope of offsetting domestic woes. Officers' origins in rural lower middle classes and minority religious communities alienated them from urban folk and the Sunni majority. The Ba'ath's nationalization and land reform policies angered the traditional merchant and landlord elite, while their secular pan-Arabism offended the pious mainstream. Increasing its unpopularity, the regime's piecemeal economic policies fed deterioration in the economy. This fueled street demonstrations, strikes, and union militancy, as well as the flight of people and capital. In this context, support for the Palestinian struggle, a popular and emotive issue across the Arab world, was a vehicle for placating public opinion. Militancy toward Israel helped, in Mark Tessler's words, "put domestic critics on the defensive, deflect public attention from local grievances, and above all enhance the Ba'ath Party's legitimacy."⁹⁸

Second, Syria's weakness in regional politics encouraged some to look to the fedayeen as a political resource in contests with other states. This weakness was primarily vis-à-vis Israel. According to Seale, Ba'ath leaders "were looking for relief from the frustrations of impotence . . . they could not contemplate surrendering to Israel, but neither could they match it in conventional battle. The guerrillas seemed to offer an honorable way out."⁹⁹ No less, support for the fedayeen offered a tool with which Ba'athists could compete with Nasser, their main rival in the pan-Arab arena. In supporting Palestinian groups, Ba'athist leaders demonstrated their uncompromising militancy and cast doubt on Egypt's claim to leadership.¹⁰⁰ In the words of one Syrian official, supporting the guerrillas enabled the Ba'ath to "rub Nasir's nose in the mud of Palestine."¹⁰¹

Third, pervasive factionalism undermined regime strength and contributed to its support for the Palestinian commandos. The Ba'ath were torn by divisions between military and civilian, young and old, rural and urban, moderate and radical, upper and lower middle class, and religious minorities and the Sunni majority. Even those from rural and minority backgrounds were split along tribal, regional, and familial lines. No less acute than internal conflicts based on ideology and identity were those driven by personal ambitions and jealousies. The result was continued coup attempts. Against this backdrop, regime stability further weakened as leaders pursued different

⁹⁸ Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 366; see also Byman, *Deadly Connections*, 121.

⁹⁹ Seale, *Assad of Syria*, 125.

¹⁰⁰ Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 377.

¹⁰¹ Cited in Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 104.

approaches to Syria's domestic crises. Each advanced his own interests, but pulled the ruling coalition in incompatible directions.¹⁰² Inter-elite strife was both an indicator and a product of the regime's weakness insofar as it lacked the experience and institutionalization to enforce legitimate procedures for making and enforcing binding decisions. Raymond Hinnebusch explains that the party was caught in a "vicious circle," as internal fragmentation weakened institution-building and weak institutions in turn prompted fragmenting behavior.¹⁰³ That individual power-holders had the autonomy to act on their own preferences was critical, because Syria's aid to the fedayeen was not formal and official. Rather, leaders undertook their own initiatives to assist the Palestinians, and the regime as a whole was too weak to regulate, restrict, or subordinate these actions to any unified state policy.¹⁰⁴ Rival Ba'ath officers even used the commandos as pawns in power struggles with each other.

These sources of regime and state weakness contributed to Syria's support for the Palestinian guerrilla movement, which in turn facilitated escalation of attacks. From Fatah's launch until the internal Ba'ath coup of February 1966, the Syrian regime aided or allowed fedayeen to carry out thirty-eight attacks.¹⁰⁵ Seeking to punish and deter these attacks, many Israeli officials concluded that Fatah was a "Syrian puppet organization."¹⁰⁶ Chief of Staff Yizhak Rabin enforced the "Rabin Doctrine," which declared that Israel should hold the Ba'ath responsible for Fatah raids and respond by attacking military and strategic targets in Syria.¹⁰⁷ Tom Segev explains that Israeli press and public opinion also blamed Syria for Palestinian attacks. "A state with a capital and a government and an army could be related to," he writes. "The still nascent Palestinian organizations were more elusive."¹⁰⁸ This picture, however, was distorted. The relationship between Syria and Palestinian commandos was not one of master and puppet, but of two parties maneuvering to maintain their own interests.¹⁰⁹ Israel mistakenly viewed a three-player game as an inter-state conflict. It thus failed to note the unique

¹⁰² Fred H. Lawson, *Why Syria Goes to War: Thirty Years of Confrontation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 43.

¹⁰³ Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba'athist Syria: Army, Party, and Peasant* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 133. For more on dynamics of fragmentation and institution-building, see Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁴ Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 124.

¹⁰⁵ Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *Linkage Politics in the Middle East: Syria Between Domestic and External Conflict, 1961–1970* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1983), 152.

¹⁰⁶ Menachem Klein, "The 'Tranquil Decade' Re-examined: Arab- Israeli Relations During the Years 1957–67," in *Israel: The First Hundred Years, Volume II: From War to Peace?* ed. Efraim Karsh (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 71.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 71; and Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 229.

¹⁰⁸ Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East*, trans. Jessica Cohen (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 194.

¹⁰⁹ Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 104–29.

strategic logic of triadic deterrence, no less the probability that its reprisals would backfire due to the weakness of the Syrian regime.

Far from diminishing under Israeli pressure, Syrian support of the Palestinians intensified in response to its own internal politics. This was particularly apparent after February 1966, when left-wing officers seized power, established a more radical neo-Ba'ath regime, and called for a popular war of liberation. The new regime further polarized society and was itself racked by internal conflict, including a struggle between neo-Ba'ath elites and elites from other political movements, contention between neo-Ba'ath elites and right-leaning interests, and rivalries among the neo-Ba'ath themselves.¹¹⁰ Foremost among the latter was the enmity between Ba'ath Party Assistant Secretary-General Salah Jadid and Defense Minister Assad. Given the dearth of institutionalized procedures for resolving inter-elite disputes, individual leaders mobilized factional bases of support against each other.¹¹¹

The result was that Syria was not a rational unitary actor as much as a collection of contradictory fragments. Even when national interests advised caution on the Palestine question, leaders in Damascus defied Israeli deterrence. To quote Seale, the neo-Ba'ath regime was "the most extreme Syria had ever known, rash abroad, radical at home, engulfing the country in war."¹¹² In this situation, Palestinian groups carried out seventy-five attacks on Israel from Syria during the fifteen months between the neo-Ba'ath coup and 15 May 1967. Tracking these attacks in parallel with intra-regime politics, Bar-Siman-Tov shows that they increased during periods in which the Jadid-Assad conflict was particularly intense and reduced when the two rivals were relatively cooperative.¹¹³ This pattern demonstrates the direct role of inner regime dissension in facilitating and encouraging non-state groups' operations.

Israel, meanwhile, did not waver in blaming these operations on the regime as an actor. "The response to Syria's actions should be targeted against the terrorist operations and against the regime," Rabin declared. "In essence, the Syria problem involves clashes with the ruling power. In this sense, the situation can be compared to relations which [were] obtained between Israel and Egypt in 1955–56."¹¹⁴ The Syrian and Egyptian situations were indeed comparable. In both cases, Israel sought to punish host states for the activity of non-state actors and in both cases this deterrence was undermined by those states' regime weaknesses. In pledging to weaken the Ba'ath government, Israel did not consider how that government's very divisions and instability contributed to motivating support for guerrilla activity.

¹¹⁰ Bar-Siman-Tov, *Linkage Politics in the Middle East*, 148.

¹¹¹ Hinnebusch, *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba'athist Syria*, 132.

¹¹² Seale, *Assad of Syria*, 104.

¹¹³ Bar-Siman-Tov, *Linkage Politics in the Middle East*, 152–53.

¹¹⁴ Cited in Klein, "The 'Tranquil Decade' Re-examined," 72.

Deterrence was ineffective because it did not alter those motivations. On the contrary, it exacerbated the regime's vulnerability and its need to derive legitimacy wherever possible, including through the Palestinian cause.

The conflict between Israel, Syria, and the Palestinians worsened as Fatah gained military skill and boldness. It quadrupled attacks from March to April 1967,¹¹⁵ amassing new popularity that pressured other Palestinian groups to join the armed struggle or be left behind.¹¹⁶ Against this backdrop, the Israel-Syria confrontation escalated dramatically on 7 April. Syria fired on an Israeli tractor in the demilitarized zone, Israel returned fire, and Syria responded with shelling. The Israeli air force then downed six Syrian jets and, for the first time, flew all the way to Damascus. In the weeks that followed, Israeli officials indicated that they held Syria responsible for the guerrillas and would strike again if Palestinian activity continued. Prime Minister Levi Eshkol repeated the promise of reprisals against the Syrian state. Rabin went further, threatening to overthrow the Ba'ath regime.¹¹⁷

Israel acted on the belief that weakening an enemy state could stop non-state actors operating across its borders, a logic that directly contradicts our argument. As we would predict, however, Israel's show of military might did not deter Syria from supporting Fatah or compel it to suppress the guerrillas. While the events leading to the 1967 war remain hotly contested,¹¹⁸ many analysts assign definitive importance to tension on the Israeli-Syrian border.¹¹⁹ Damascus intensified its support for the fedayeen and increased pressure on Egypt to take action as well. This contributed to Nasser's decision to request withdrawal of United Nations troops from Sinai and then close the Straits of Tiran.¹²⁰ The Syrian regime's weakness played a role in inducing its belligerence. Economic and social conflict was surging in Syria during this period, and Ba'ath leaders hoped that aggression toward Israel could defuse it. War offered an excuse and a vehicle for asserting control over unruly paramilitary organizations, outmaneuvering the ascendant Muslim Brotherhood, extending state control over the economy, and acquiring increased Soviet assistance.¹²¹

Had Syria had a more institutionalized state and unified regime, these domestic benefits might have paled in comparison to the risks of war with a more powerful foe. These risks were particularly grave because Syria's army, devastated by purges and distracted by politics, was in no condition

¹¹⁵ Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 139.

¹¹⁶ Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*.

¹¹⁷ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 236; see also Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land*, 106–8.

¹¹⁸ Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim, ed., *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹¹⁹ See Lawson, *Why Syria Goes to War*, 21; and Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 235.

¹²⁰ Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 53–60.

¹²¹ Lawson, *Why Syria Goes to War*, 21.

for combat. For the dangerously divided leaders in Damascus, however, the domestic political utility of needling Israel appeared to outweigh the costs. The severe fragmentation of Syria's ruling coalition left it unable to weigh the implications of its actions, as would a rational unitary actor. As a result, in Seale's words, "Syria escalated from weakness" and "Israel was able in response to escalate from strength."¹²²

Israel's victory in 1967 projected overwhelming military power. Still, the absence of a direct correlation between Israel's military might and effective triadic deterrence was evident in the war's paradoxical outcome. On the one hand, the defeat showed Arab states the dire risks of provoking war with Israel. On the other hand, it sapped their political latitude for restricting the main provocateur: the Palestinian commandos. Arab publics lauded the fedayeen as the only force still fighting Israel. State leaders had little choice but to endorse the guerrillas if they were to placate popular criticism and prove their continued commitment to Palestine. They hence increased assistance to the commandos and allowed them to expand bases in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. New commando groups formed and throngs of recruits joined, especially after the much-hailed 1968 Battle of Karameh in which Fatah fighters ambushed Israeli troops. Catapulted by a new hero status, Fatah and other guerrilla groups assumed control of the PLO in 1969.

In Syria, meanwhile, the June defeat inflamed rifts among elites, prodding each to trade blame for loss of the Golan Heights and advance distinct strategies for recovering it. Ever more fierce, the enmity between Jadid and Assad came to dominate all aspects of Syrian politics. It also aided fedayeen activity. It distracted authorities' attention from Palestinian groups, which exploited the opportunity to increase their presence on the border.¹²³ In addition, it motivated both rivals to fortify Palestinian forces as tools in their competition with each other.¹²⁴ In 1968, the Ba'ath party created its own Palestinian guerrilla squad. It remained dormant until the Jadid faction revived it under the name *Sa'iqa*. *Sa'iqa* would evolve into a formidable agent of attacks against Israel and a powerful representative of Syrian interests within the PLO. Its origins, however, lay in intra-Ba'ath competition. Jadid built *Sa'iqa* as his "private army" against the regular army under Assad's control.¹²⁵ Jadid encouraged *Sa'iqa* and PLO groups to operate against Israel.¹²⁶ In result, the number of violent incidents against Israel from Syria soared from 25 in 1968, to 276 in 1969, to 454 in 1970. While it is not clear

¹²² Seale, *Assad of Syria*, 25.

¹²³ Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 187.

¹²⁴ John W. Amos II, *Palestinian Resistance: Organization of a National Movement* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980), 101–4.

¹²⁵ *Middle East Record*, vol. 5, 1969–1970 (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press), 1,149.

¹²⁶ Moshe Maoz, *Syria and Israel: From War to Peacemaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 118.

how many of these were executed by Palestinian groups, it can be presumed that their total increased in kind.¹²⁷

Assad opposed this track. Israel's shows of force convinced him that guerrilla strikes led only to Israeli retaliation. He advocated subordination of non-state actors to the goals of rebuilding the Syrian army and preparing for conventional war.¹²⁸ Assad sought to make this strategy effective by restraining the army from initiating attacks and by trying to wrestle some authority over Sa'iqa.¹²⁹ However, he lacked power outside his base in the armed forces. In other words, Israel effectively compelled Syria to thwart Palestinian operations where Assad was strong, but this compulsion was partial because Assad exercised control within only one fragment of the divided Syrian regime. Should Assad manage to take the reins of the state and unify it under his authority, this potential for deterrence could become effective.

Since 1970

This is precisely what came to pass. As Syrian Ba'athists were struggling with each other, the Palestinian fedayeen came to approximate a state within a state in Jordan. Reasserting sovereignty, Jordanian King Hussein launched an onslaught on Palestinian bases in 1970 that became known as "Black September." Responding, the Jadid faction sent two hundred to three hundred Syrian tanks into Jordan to assist the fedayeen. Assad, however, refused to dispatch the Syrian Air Force to provide the requisite cover. In consequence, Jordanian planes attacked the exposed Syrian armor. They destroyed nearly half its fleet, caused some six hundred casualties, and compelled a withdrawal after two days.¹³⁰

The aborted intervention was disastrous for Syria. Though seemingly irrational with reference to state interests, it is explicable in terms of Syria's weak regime. Jadid intervened in Jordan at least in part to assert his power vis-à-vis Assad¹³¹—who, to do the same, refused to intervene.¹³² In this, Assad was also heeding Israeli deterrence. When Jadid dispatched tanks to Jordan, Israel responded by sending two brigades into the Golan. It warned air strikes if Syria did not withdraw. Syria's contradictory response to Israeli

¹²⁷ *Middle East Record*, vol. 4, 1968 (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press), 322–24; and *Middle East Record*, vol. 5, 1969–1970, 203.

¹²⁸ Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "Revisionist Dreams, Realist Strategies: The Foreign Policy of Syria," in *Foreign Policies of Arab States*, eds., Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 392.

¹²⁹ Bar-Siman-Tov, *Linkage Politics in the Middle East*, 164–65.

¹³⁰ Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 265.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 264.

¹³² *Middle East Record*, vol. 5, 1969–1970, 1,150.

threats was thus a product of its own internal turmoil.¹³³ It was also a turning point that brought that turmoil to the brink. In the two months that followed, the Jadid faction voted to dismiss Assad, who in turn launched a coup and seized power.

Assad's "Corrective Movement" was not simply another turnover in the interminably weak Syrian state. The prior seven years had seen a gradual process of Ba'ath institutionalization. In result, Hinnebusch writes, "The state whose helm Assad inherited was a far sturdier structure than the fragile entity the Ba'ath had seized in 1963."¹³⁴ It grew sturdier still under Assad's pragmatic, authoritarian rule. Increasingly over the course of the 1970s, Syria came to boast a well-organized party, a complex bureaucracy, a viable public sector, and a stabilized economy.¹³⁵ Solidifying a "presidential monarchy," Assad made strides toward building a cross-sectarian coalition by balancing conflicting social forces, making alliances with the merchant elite, and garnering genuine popularity at the local level. He used the army to gain autonomy from the Ba'ath party, and used his core of followers to gain autonomy from the army. These processes of centralization, institutionalization, and legitimization gave his regime the internal cohesion to define realistic goals and consistently match ends to means. Hinnebusch does not mince words: Assad's Syria, he argues, acted exactly as one would expect of a "rational actor."¹³⁶

This regime strength empowered Assad to impose a tough policy toward the fedayeen. He used his centralized rule to require PLO groups to acquire permission before holding rallies, issuing publications, recruiting Syrian nationals, or traveling in and out of the country.¹³⁷ Syrian authorities confiscated a major arms shipment from Algeria to Fatah, which sent a sharp message. In addition to restricting the fedayeen, Assad asserted greater control over the PLA. He dismissed some officers and pressed others to join the Ba'ath party. Having earlier put Sa'iqa facilities under army guard, he continued to subordinate the group by appointing his own loyalist to its command.¹³⁸ Facing greater restrictions from Syria and other strong Arab states, many Palestinian groups shifted from cross-border strikes to international acts of violence such as plane hijacking or covert operations, mainly in Europe.

In this context, Israeli military strikes achieved the deterrence that they previously had not achieved. Between August 1970 and the October 1973

¹³³ Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 52.

¹³⁴ Hinnebusch, *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba'athist Syria*, 139–40.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹³⁶ Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "The Foreign Policy of Syria," in *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, eds., Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 148, 151.

¹³⁷ Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 288–89.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

War, Israel conducted twenty-four incursions into Syria, targeting the Syrian armed forces and Palestinian training camps.¹³⁹ Following Palestinian militants' killing of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics, Israel retaliated by bombing Lebanon and Syria with the largest air strike since 1967. Echoing the deterrent strategy of prior decades, an Israeli officer explained, "the message is directed not only to the terrorists but also to the countries that harbor them."¹⁴⁰ Unlike prior decades, however, decision makers in Damascus had the consolidated authority to receive the message and the strength to act on it. Exercising political and military muscle, Assad quickly ordered guerrillas away from the border.¹⁴¹ January 1973 saw another clash near the Golan, during which Israel shot down thirteen Syrian fighter jets. Thereafter, the Syrian army prohibited PLO groups from entering the area or from carrying out operations into Israeli-occupied territory without prior approval.¹⁴² Syria's relationship to the fedayeen had turned a new page, as Bard O'Neill summarizes:

By the spring of 1973, the [fedayeen's] general situation in terms of sanctuary and freedom of movement was not good. Though the guerillas were still present in Syria, they were closely monitored and restricted by the government. Moreover, operations across the Syrian border and infiltration into Lebanon and Syria were reduced to insignificance.¹⁴³

Syria shifted from being the commandos' main backer to a constraint on their armed activity. This shift was not attributable to Israeli military power alone. Prior to 1967, Israel retaliated against both Palestinian raids and Syrian shelling with increasingly severe blows, yet did not succeed in deterring Syria's support of non-state actors' attacks. Then in the 1967 war and the three years that followed, Israel unambiguously demonstrated its superior military power. Yet deterrence continued to fail. Only after 1970 did Israeli strikes on Syria propel it to stop guerrilla groups. What changed was not Israeli actions but the stabilization of Syria's own regime. Comparison of governments before and after Assad's coup illustrates three mechanisms through which the effectiveness of triadic deterrence is conditioned by the strength of the host regime. First, Assad's strengthening of state institutions increased his ability to restrict non-state actors. In prior years, domestic volatility, intra-elite rivalries, and fragmented institutions generated opportunities for the fedayeen to

¹³⁹ Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land*, 331.

¹⁴⁰ Terrence Smith, "Scores of Israeli Planes Strike 10 Guerrilla Bases in a Reprisal for Munich," *New York Times*, 9 September 1972.

¹⁴¹ Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 312.

¹⁴² Juan de Oniss, "Syria Said to Tell Guerrillas to Quit Villages Near Heights," *New York Times*, 24 January 1973.

¹⁴³ Bard E. O'Neill, *Armed Struggle in Palestine: A Political-Military Analysis* (Denver, CO: Westview Press, 1978), 178.

acquire resources and operational autonomy. Regime consolidation curtailed internal power struggles and thereby closed these doors to the guerrillas. It also redoubled the army's capacity to put restrictions on the Palestinians into effect.

Second, the stability of Assad's regime empowered it to act on controversial issues. After 1963, Syrian society's discontent reached crisis proportions, and the Ba'ath welcomed the Palestinian struggle as a political resource with which to divert and dampen unrest. By 1969, however, correspondents reported "Syria is in very good shape economically and relatively stable politically."¹⁴⁴ Under Assad, Syrian authorities no longer needed the fedayeen as a political diversion. On the contrary, growing popularity at home enabled them to restrict the Palestinian struggle, despite its continued appeal among the Syrian people.

Finally, state strength enabled Assad's regime to act in ways closer to realist assumptions. Gone were the days in which every Ba'ath official acted on his own private interest, using the Palestinians to outmaneuver his rivals, and bringing the country as a whole to the brink of calamity. Centralization of power rendered Syria more akin to a unitary actor with a utilitarian decision-making calculus. A stronger state gave Syria stronger *raison d'état*. For Assad, this meant doing whatever necessary to avert Israeli military punishments and threats against Syria. Responding to both deterrence and compellence, he adopted a policy of supporting Palestinian operations from Lebanon and elsewhere, but banning them from the Golan Heights. "Asad [*sic*] would not prevent anyone going off to fight Israel," Seale wrote. "But in Syria at least any such operation had to be firmly controlled and subordinated to national policy."¹⁴⁵

Effective deterrence against non-state actors in Syria continued as the norm in the wake of the 1973 war, during Syria's tumultuous involvement in the Lebanese civil war, through the ups and downs of the Middle East peace process, and through the transition from Hafez al-Assad to his son Bashar al-Assad. Over the years, Assad, the father, allied with Arafat or went to extreme lengths to try to depose him. He offered vital support and shelter to hard-line Palestinian factions or directly challenged them.¹⁴⁶ Underlying the seeming contradiction in Syria's relations to the Palestinian movement was a brutally consistent bottom line: Syria's national interests came first. It would support the armed struggle of non-state actors but, deterred by the threat of Israeli retaliation, would make sure that groups did not attack across Syria's own border.¹⁴⁷ Israeli deterrence had sent a powerful

¹⁴⁴ William Tuohy, "Hihacking Reflects Syria's Dilemma," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 September 1969.

¹⁴⁵ Seale, *Assad of Syria*, 282.

¹⁴⁶ Hinnebusch, "Revisionist Dreams, Realist Strategies," 381.

¹⁴⁷ Yaniv, *Deterrence Without the Bomb*, 167; Maoz, *Syria and Israel*, 162; and Itamar Rabinovich, *The View from Damascus: State, Political Community, and Foreign Relation in Twentieth-Century Syria* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008), 180.

message, and the regime in Damascus was strong enough to receive it and act accordingly.

LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this article we present a theory of triadic deterrence: deterrence of states that host or support non-state actors' violent activity across borders. Although seemingly similar to the structure of conventional state-to-state deterrence, these triadic conflicts entail a complex asymmetry that combines dynamics of both deterrence and compellence. This renders them a distinct situation calling for a distinct analytical framework. We argue that triadic deterrence is more successful against strong regimes than weak ones. Analysis of two cases from the Arab-Israeli conflict, chosen for their combination of between-case and within-case variation, illustrates this argument. In both Egypt and Syria, weak regimes rendered authorities unable to act against violent non-state actors within their borders, and actually generated domestic political motivations for supporting such actors. In this context, Israeli attempts to deter non-state actors by punishing their host states did not have a deterrent effect. At some times, retaliation was irrelevant because the host regime's most significant sources of threat were domestic. At other times, retaliation further weakened the regime's political and physical capacity, and was thus actually counterproductive. As each regime institutionalized a legitimate, central authority, however, they became both more able and more willing to put their own state and regime interests above all else. As Table 1 summarizes, it was only then that Israel's attempts at deterrence saw success.

The host state's interests in non-state violence and Israel's military power were also important in each case. However, neither is sufficient to explain deterrent outcomes in the absence of regime strength. Egypt tried to stop Palestinians' infiltrations to Israel before 1955, yet lacked the institutional and political capacity to do so. Syria actively aided Palestinian guerrilla groups in the late 1960s, but many of its impetuses for doing so stemmed not from Israeli action as much as the Ba'ath's own domestic problems and internal rivalries. Whether a source of motivation or constraint, therefore, the weakness of these regimes played a vital role in dooming Israeli deterrence

TABLE 1 Israel's Triadic Deterrence: Summary of Outcomes

	Relative Regime Strength	Outcome for Triadic Deterrence
Egypt 1952–1956	Weak	Failure
Egypt 1957–1979	Strong	Success
Syria 1965–1970	Weak	Failure
Syria 1970–	Strong	Success

to failure. Egypt and Syria were well aware of their military disadvantage against Israel. However, this awareness was not sufficient to deter them from supporting non-state actors or compel them to act against these actors as long as the regimes in Cairo and Damascus were weak.

Further corroboration of these patterns is found in other cases of Israel's deterrence and compellence of host states, from strikes against Jordan to stop Palestinian commandos before 1970 to actions against the Palestinian Authority to curb Islamist groups after 1993. The same is arguably the case today. In debates ranging from the popular press to the top brass, a sizable portion of Israelis believe that aggressive military action is necessary to establish or reassert deterrence against persistent threats. This conviction has influenced both discourse and decision making during the country's conflicts since the year 2000.¹⁴⁸

A particularly telling case of triadic deterrence is the 2006 Second Lebanon War. Israel reacted to Hezbollah's killing and kidnapping of soldiers not only by targeting this non-state actor, but also by targeting the Lebanese state and public infrastructure. Nearly ten thousand air and naval strikes killed more than a thousand people, displaced up to 25 percent of the population, and did an estimated \$3.5 billion in material damage.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the war, many of Israel's top strategists concluded that deterrence had failed because Israel had primarily aimed at the wrong target: Hezbollah, rather than the Lebanese state. They thus assumed that stopping the non-state actor required aggressive action against the state from which it drew strength. If such moves did not bear fruit, it was because the retaliation did not cause enough pain.¹⁵⁰ For many Israeli pundits, this lesson applied across the board, regardless of whether or not the targeted regime was the authoritarian regime of Assad's Syria or the chronically weak government of Lebanon.

Our analysis shows why this policy is misguided. Triadic deterrence is likely to work best under certain circumstances: when the regime of the host state is sufficiently strong and possesses the institutional and political capacity to enforce unpopular policies. Otherwise, deterrence may be irrelevant. It may also be counterproductive, to the degree that it further corrodes the

¹⁴⁸ Yoram Peri, "The Israeli Military and Israel's Palestinian Policy," *Peaceworks* no. 47 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2002); and Jeremy Pressman, "The Second Intifada: An Early Look at the Background and Causes of Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Studies* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 114-41.

¹⁴⁹ Amnesty International, "Lebanon: Deliberate Destruction or 'Collateral Damage'? Israeli Attacks on Civilian Infrastructure," briefing MDE 18/007/2006, 22 August 2006.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Gadi Eisenkot, Israel's northern command chief, *Yediot Ahronot* [Hebrew], 3 October 2008; and Fadi Eyadat, "Barak: Israel to Target Lebanon if Hezbollah Escalates Tension," *Haaretz*, 24 November 2009, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1130385.html>. The IDF pushed for broader destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure, but under American pressure Prime Minister Olmert objected. See Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *34 Days: Israel, Hezbollah, and the War in Lebanon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 77-82.

regime. In other words, it is not fruitful for a state to strike at a weak regime without considering that regime's physical or political inability to control non-state actors. It is even less helpful for it to hit the pillars of the targeted state or to continue threatening to do so. Such policies only reduce the targeted regime's ability to cope with non-state actors. They sometimes render the non-state actor even more powerful than the state that hosts it.

This lesson is pertinent in light of the uprisings that swept across the Arab world in 2011. In the long run, genuine democratic transformations in states in the Middle East may increase both their popular legitimacy and the strength of their domestic institutions. In accord, it will bolster potential for effective triadic deterrence, should non-state actors attempt to launch operations from their soil. In the short term, however, upheavals are likely to generate social, economic, and political uncertainty. Where uprisings remain ongoing, mass protest exposes the lack of legitimacy of embattled rulers and stretches thin the capacity of their security and other institutions. Where old regimes have collapsed, new systems require time to become institutionalized. Until then, both political rules and personnel may be in flux. As these conditions heighten regime weakness, the implications for both transnational non-state violence and triadic deterrence discussed in this article may come to the fore. They were perhaps already evident in the summer of 2011, when militants attacked Israel from Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. The weak transitional status of the government in Cairo resulted in a weakened grip over its northern periphery. This created the context in which non-state actors defied Israeli deterrence and launched a cross-border attack.

Our argument has received insufficient scholarly attention because it has fallen through the cracks of two security literatures. Literature on deterrence tends not to consider how the strength of the targeted regime conditions deterrent policies. Literature on insurgency continually highlights the issue of regime weakness, but does not identify implications for the conduct of deterrence. We bridge this gap, demonstrating the extent to which "two-level games" bring leaders to respond to internal impetuses, even when they invite external risks.¹⁵¹ We also show that state action is a product not only of will, but also of institutional capacities and domestic politics.¹⁵² Deterrence typically aims to reduce a regime's interests in advancing a military challenge by elevating the costs of doing so. It does not increase a state's ability to prevent activities by parties not directly answerable to its command. Neither does it empower authorities' ability to undertake unpopular or politically risky policies. In fact, to the degree that deterrence imposes material, physical, or political losses on a state, it diminishes these capabilities.

¹⁵¹ Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 427-60.

¹⁵² For parallel dynamics in non-state actors, see Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement*.

A fuller evaluation of the theory of triadic deterrence calls for exploration of a larger range of cases. Among relevant cases are India's conflict with Pakistan over militant groups such as Lashkar e-Taiba and Turkey's struggle with Iraq and Syria over the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Nevertheless, even our initial findings hold profound implications for both the study and the practice of deterrence. It suggests a counterintuitive insight for policy: a strong enemy might not always be worse than a weak one.