

Terrorism and Affect Control

David Heise
Indiana University—Bloomington
and

Steven Lerner
Yankelovich Partners and University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill

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Every kind of sociologist has a contribution to make in understanding the 9/11 infamy. We want to offer some ideas that come from symbolic interactionism and affect control theory.

Fighting Via Others

We focus specifically on how rulers fight with one another. This is one of the great concerns facing humanity because just in the last century scores of millions of humans have died as the collateral barbarity of such fights. Yet the altercations leave the principals so unbruised that rulers in generation after generation feel no hesitation in starting anew.

Macroactions

An essential insight for understanding the phenomenon is that people frequently use social organizations as instruments of their actions. Daily life provides many examples: e.g., feting a friend with a restaurant, mowing grass with a lawn maintenance firm, healing an injured child with a hospital emergency room, educating offspring with a school, etc. People in all walks of life engage in such macroactions, but macroactions are the particular prerogative of magnates and rulers who use corporations and armies to involve thousands of people in concerted happenings that are far-reaching in time and space.

Three things are required to make activities in a group of people dependable enough for outsiders to use them as a means to important goals (Heise and Durig, 1997). First, relevant activities in the group must be determinate so that

engaging in one of the actions implies a relevant product: for example, grilling a steak guarantees cooked meat. Second, the relevant group activities must be purposeful. Purposefulness means that an action generates a product for a particular beneficiary who receives the product and uses it in subsequent events. For example, a cook grills a steak for a waiter who garnishes it and delivers it to a customer. Third, the relevant group activities must be mobilizable. Mobilizability means that designated actors invariably begin their actions when presented with some particular object because the actors are motivated by incentives, coercions, or their personal values. For example, a cook begins grilling a steak when presented with an order.

Group activities that are determinate, purposeful, and mobilizable can produce mechanistic sequences of action that result in predictable outcomes. It is such sequences that we invoke when we use social organizations as instruments of our own action. A central reason that social organizations are assembled is to provide sets of such sequences to outside actors.

Now to the point: armies and terrorist groups are social organizations that enable rulers to attack their enemies. That is, national or partisan rulers can order these social organizations to achieve the confinement, mutilation, or death of an enemy leader's population, or the destruction of enemy facilities. In material terms, such a macroaction disables the enemy's social instruments, thereby preventing an enemy ruler from engaging in macroactions.

The costs of military macroactions are high for victims and for warriors whose lives are lost or disrupted, but the costs are low for rulers. A belligerent head of state hitting his opponent with his army doesn't even bruise his knuckles.

Macro-Interaction

Warriors who put themselves in harm's way in military operations capture the public's attention, but a fascination with military operatives should not distract us from those who

set the operatives in motion. Rulers and popular leaders are the primary interacting agents in military operations.

For example, initially at least, President Bush identified Osama bin Laden as the target in his war on terrorism. Bush declared that bin Laden instigated the attacks that resulted in thousands of American deaths and the destruction of emblematic buildings. President Bush saw bin Laden as the man who set terrorist squads in motion, declared he wanted bin Laden “dead or alive” (*New York Times*, September 18, 2001), and ordered tens of thousands of U.S.A. military operatives into motion in ships and aircraft with lethal munitions in order to do the job. Similarly, President Bush has identified Saddam Hussein as a fomenter of evil acts and declared Saddam Hussein must be deposed as ruler, by a military attack on Iraq if necessary (*New York Times*, April 6, 2002).

Another example. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak was engaging in peace talks with Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat when an election replaced him with Ariel Sharon as Israel’s premier (*New York Times*, February 7, 2001). Premier Minister Sharon wasted little time identifying Chairman Arafat as the instigator of suicide terrorism in Israel. In the spring of 2002 Sharon ordered his military to invade the Palestinian territory and siege Arafat’s headquarters. Sharon declared that Arafat could leave but only for exile (*New York Times*, April 3, 2002).

In these recent clashes we have rulers personalizing international altercations, identifying the rulers of enemy factions as the villains whose actions necessitate military responses. Taking these rulers seriously, we now turn to analyzing international clashes as personal interactions among rulers, who use militaries and other government agencies as instruments of their individual actions. In other words, we will now consider international relations as personal interactions of rulers conducted via political and military macroactions¹.

Simulations

Taking the position that international relations are the personal interactions of rulers justifies analyzing the interactions with affect control theory. An affect control theory formulation of international relations goes like this.

A ruler adopts his nation's international identity, and he sees other rulers in terms of their nations' international identities. The ruler then uses macroactions to create international events generating impressions of ruler-nations that confirm the sentiments attached to the identities.

Sentiments have an Evaluation component (good versus bad), a Potency component (powerful versus powerless), and an Activity component (lively versus inactive). Each affective component is measured on a scale from -4.3 (infinitely bad, powerless, or inactive) to +4.3 (infinitely good, powerful, or lively). Sentiments attach to identities and also to behaviors. For example², a "patriot" is extremely good (2.7), quite powerful (1.9), and slightly lively (1.4); "assassinating" is quite bad, neither powerful nor powerless, and slightly lively (-2.1, 0.4, 1.2). The measurement of a sentiment in terms of Evaluation, Potency, and Activity is called an EPA profile.

International Macroactions

Macroactions that are available to a ruler for the conduct of international relations have been identified, and the sentiments attached to these macroactions have been measured (Azar and Lerner, 1981). The 125 inter-state behaviors³ were rated on goodness, powerfulness, and activity by professionals in international relations (professors, consulting firm specialists, State Department employees). For example, the most cooperative action was Merging Voluntarily Into One Nation State, rated as quite good (2.4), quite powerful (1.6), and quite active (1.9). The worst action was Conduct Campaigns Of Genocide, rated as extremely bad, quite powerful, and quite active (-3.4 2.0 2.2).

A database of international events assembled from worldwide media reports (Azar, 1980) records inter-state behaviors in more specific terms than the 125 inter-state behaviors in the

Azar and Lerner (1981) article. However, Lerner (1983, Appendix G) used the ratings of the 125 behaviors to statistically estimate the goodness, powerfulness, and activity of the more specific behaviors in the database, allowing the database to be used for affect control theory studies.

International Identities

Lerner (1983) analyzed events between 26 nations in the Middle East plus the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) during the years 1971-1975. As a first simplifying step, Lerner clustered the 27 Middle East political entities into 12 blocks of structurally equivalent actors who behaved similarly toward entities in other blocks and who were treated similarly by entities in other blocks⁴. Then Lerner assembled the sentiments associated with inter-nation macroactions between each block, and he computed the average EPA profile of the macroactions in each direction.

Table 1
Sample EPA Profiles Derived from International Behaviors
of Middle East Actors, 1971-75

	Syria / PLO	U.S.A.
Israel's Actions Toward Other	-1.0, 0.8, 1.2	0.8, 0.4, 0.4
Other's Actions Toward Israel	-1.1, 0.7, 1.2	0.9, 0.5, 0.5
Identities Based on All Regional Interactions	<i>Israel</i> : -1.0, 1.0, 1.0	<i>U.S.A.</i> : 0.7, 0.4, 0.5
	<i>Syria / PLO</i> : -0.3, 0.8, 0.9	
Relational Identity for Israel With Other	-1.12, 0.62, 1.23	0.53, 0.09, 0.66
Relational Identity for Other With Israel	-0.97, 0.54, 1.26	0.23, 0.11, 0.69

Note. EPA profiles are from Lerner's (1983) Tables 4-1, 4-2, 4-3, 4-8. International behaviors are from Azar and Lerner (1981). Relational identities were computed with *Interact* On-Line (Heise, 2002) because Lerner did not report these.

Table 1 shows some selected results. Israel's macroactions toward the block containing Syria and the PLO had an average EPA profile of -1.0, 0.8, 1.2, which is to say that the macroactions were slightly bad, slightly potent, and slightly lively—as with border-police actions or leveling strong propaganda attacks. The Syria/PLO block's macroactions toward Israel had an average profile of -1.1, 0.7, 1.2, essentially matching what the Israelis were doing. Meanwhile, Israel's macroactions toward the U.S.A. had an average EPA of 0.8, 0.4, 0.4—slightly positive actions as with issuing joint communiqués, or arranging nongovernmental exchanges and visitors. The U.S.A. acted toward Israel similarly with an average EPA of 0.9, 0.5, 0.5, as with issuing joint

communiqués, or selling the Israelis industrial, technological, or surplus supplies.

Lerner used the average EPAs for between-block macroactions to obtain EPA profiles for the identity of each block actor. His procedure involved a complex iterative analysis seeking the best EPA profile for predicting macroactions delivered and received by each block, under the assumption that rulers maintain identities as specified in affect control theory. The results for Israel, Syria/PLO, and U.S.A. are shown in Table 1. Overall, in relating to other Middle East actors, Israel was maintaining a general regional identity that was slightly bad, slightly potent, and slightly active (-1.0, 1.0, 1.0, like a rival). The Syria/PLO block maintained a regional identity that was not good but not very bad, slightly potent, and slightly active (-0.3, 0.8, 0.9, like a critic). The U.S.A. maintained a regional identity that was slightly good, not powerless but not very powerful, and not inactive but not very active (0.7, 0.4, 0.5, like a colleague).

Regional identities don't explain all of the differences in a Middle East actor's relations with different nations—e.g., there is substantial difference between Israel's relations with the Syria/PLO block and Israel's relations with the U.S.A. Affect control theory can specify a relational identity that accounts for an actor's behavior toward a particular object. Relational identities for the Israel-Syria/PLO dyad and for the Israel-U.S.A. dyad are shown in Table 1.

Israel's regional identity needs little changing to account for Israel's behavior toward Syria/PLO. However, in dealing with Israel, Syria and the PLO take on a relational identity that is nastier and livelier than their general Middle Eastern identity. Meanwhile, Israel's relational identity with the U.S.A. is less bad and less powerful than the Israeli regional identity. The U.S.A. also has a somewhat nicer and less potent relational identity when interacting with Israel.

Testing the Model

Lerner (1983, pp. 130-132) gave the following example of how affect control theory provides non-intuitive predictions

regarding international relations. Israel exchanged war dead with Egypt March 19, 1977—a cooperative action, and affect control theory predicts that this cooperation would increase conflict to restore the two nations “proper” negative identities with each other: Egypt should organize hostile demonstrations against Israel, and Israel should condemn Egypt’s policies.

Replicating and extending earlier work by Lerner⁵, we conducted an analysis to determine whether affect control theory accounts for inter-nation macroactions in the Middle East in the period 1976-1979, using the sentiments for database behaviors and for relational identities inferred empirically for the period 1971-1975. We found 359 events in which one or both participants was a political entity in the Middle East, where an initiator’s action on a recipient was followed within three weeks by two return actions from the recipient. Using the initiator’s action on the recipient as input, we computed⁶ the affect control theory prediction of return action to see if the prediction would correlate with the actual return actions.

For example, on April 26, 1976 the Moroccan foreign minister visited Kuwait for talks; then on April 27 the Kuwait finance minister agreed with his Moroccan counterpart to establish an Arab finance fund; and on May 2 Kuwait established a joint finance company with Morocco. The predicted EPA profile for Kuwait’s return action following the Moroccan visit is 0.8, 0.8, 1.0, as compared to an EPA profile of 1.8, 1.0, 0.5 for Kuwait’s actual first return action, and 1.9, 1.0, 0.8 for Kuwait’s second return action.

We employed canonical correlation analysis over all 359 events to see if affect control theory’s predictions of return actions correlate with the actual return actions. The EPA profiles for predicted actions constituted one set of variables in the canonical analysis and the EPA profiles for the two return actions constituted the other set of variables.

A single canonical correlation of 0.69 was significant⁷. That is, a composite of the predicted EPA scores correlates 0.69 with a composite of the EPA scores for the actual return actions.

Thus, affect control theory predictions account for more than 45 percent of the variance in EPA profiles of responses to focal incidents⁸.

Macroactions and Emotions

The notion of macroaction was not available to Lerner (1983), and in fact was developed partly as a response to Lerner's study, to comprehend how symbolic interaction and affect control theory could work so well in international relations (Heise and Durig, 1997).

Affect control theory's model of emotion also was not available to Lerner, and we now turn to a brief presentation of how rulers' emotions might correspond to a sequence of international events. We will use the relational identities for Israel (-1.12, 0.62, 1.23) and the PLO (-0.97, 0.54, 1.26) reported in Table 1, along with the list of inter-nation macroactions and their EPA profiles, as provided by Azar and Lerner (1981). These we entered into a computer program for simulating sequences of social interaction on the basis of affect control theory (Schneider and Heise, 1995).

We started off by forcing an event: the PLO being cooperative with Israel by having a meeting of high officials. This level of cooperation is uncharacteristic of the relation between the two, though not terribly surprising because their negative identities give them wide latitude for all kinds of behavior. Affect control theory predicts that in ordering this event the PLO ruler experiences well-being emotions like feeling at-ease, contented, calm. The Israeli ruler who is the recipient is predicted to feel no emotion, though a little bit awe-struck perhaps.

Affect control theory predicts that the Israeli ruler will get things back to normal rapidly, by leveling propaganda attacks at the PLO. The Israeli leader feels no emotion in doing so, or maybe a touch of anger. The Palestinian's emotion might take the form of feeling melancholy, overwhelmed, or no emotion.

Now the Palestinian ruler warns Israel about engaging in hostile acts, feeling no emotion. The Israeli leader is shocked, melancholy, apprehensive.

The Israeli ruler responds by increasing troop movements, feeling somewhat angry in doing so. As a result, the Palestinian ruler feels overwhelmed, melancholy, shocked.

The Palestinian ruler's response is to encourage guerilla activity against Israel, feeling mild melancholy. The Israeli ruler feels melancholy, shocked, apprehensive.

And so on.

According to affect control theory, emotions are not motivating factors in any of these events, because the events are motivated by the rulers' desires to maintain relational identities. However, as they act, rulers contrive broadcasts of their emotions in order to communicate the meaning of what they are doing to their own citizenry and to the outside world. Additionally their emotions are a major part of the lived experience of the conflict.

Does Peace Have a Chance?

Lerner (1983) concluded that affect control theory does well in accounting for international interactions.

Compared to other models that have tried to simulate international events, the present effort can be considered very successful. A recent review of the literature concludes that ... there has been a relatively universal failure of simulation models in their ability to predict the occurrence of specific events between nations. ... None of the previous attempts to model international relations considers nation state behavior to be the product of a control system, much less one related to cognitive processes. (pp.144-5)

The results reported here are even better than those that Lerner (1983) called successful. Still more explanatory power could be obtained from affect control theory by considering an actor's restorative events with interaction partners in addition to the one involved in a focal event. That is, the consequences of a focal event may reverberate through an actor's whole network of relationships, and these effects also could be predicted by affect control theory in principle.

The implication of this success is that rulers use political and military organizations in order to engage in inter-nation macroactions that maintain the affective meanings of national

identities. Does this help in understanding and perhaps ameliorating international conflict?

The miserable news from a control perspective on international conflict is that nothing much changes because the community of international rulers subconsciously works to maintain each nation in its place. That means, for example, that rogue states are being maintained as rogue states, both from within and internationally, by ensnaring them into violence whenever they get too cooperative. Thereby, the character of states is maintained for decades. Thus, for example, the above simulation of Israel-PLO relations reads like a report on happenings in the years 2000-2002 even though it is derived from data obtained a quarter of a century before⁹.

The hopeful news is that nothing much changes because the community of international rulers subconsciously works to maintain each nation in its place. That means that rulers cooperate to prevent reckless dives to abysmal violence. Most important, perhaps, the rulers of rogue states themselves avoid violence so extreme that it would completely change the affective meaning of their states. On this basis it is reasonable to suppose that if states avoided horrific acts in the past then they will continue to do so in the future.

The confusing news associated with a control perspective on international conflict is that national identities do appear to change sometimes. For example, Afghanistan was the most benign of the Middle Eastern nations in the 1970s according to Lerner's (1983) analyses, but its recent Taliban rulers were very negativistic, and perhaps co-conspired to attack the U.S.A. The U.S.A. was a rather insipid Middle East actor in the 1970s, but during the 1991 Gulf War the U.S.A. brought the largest tank battle in history to Arab soil.

What caused these changes in national identities? Or are there changes? Could current international activities in the Middle East be efforts to correct the deviations and get these nations back where they belong?

We can't answer these questions. So we'll just repeat that favorite platitude of scientists: More research is needed.

References

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Notes

¹ We too watch *The West Wing* so we know that the President of the United States is not an individual, but a group. In other words, when the President or other ruler orders a macroaction, the act is an outcome of political negotiations among a coterie of advisors. That is interesting and important to study, but we will ignore the matter here, and suppose that actions of a ruler can be viewed as the actions of the preeminent individual in the ruling group.

² The EPA profile for patriot is from Heise (1978) with corrections of the metric to change the original maximum value of 3 to 4.3. The profile for assassinating is from Heise (2002) drawing on the Northern Ireland dictionary and averaging male and female ratings.

³ The authors list 125 behaviors in their table, though their text refers to 130. Additionally they provide data on 113 actions that occur within a nation.

⁴ Here we focus on just three blocks: the U.S.A., Israel, and Syria/PLO.

⁵ Lerner (1983) selected 314 events from 1976 to 1979 and computed affect control theory's predicted response to each. The dependent variable was built from the first two reactions that actually followed the focal action (two in case one or the other might not have been a response to the focal event). Lerner transformed the prediction EPA and the average EPA profile of the two responses to scale values on a single-dimension measure of cooperation-conflict (Azar and Lerner, 1981). The correlation between the predicted amount of cooperation-conflict and the observed amount of cooperation-conflict following focal events was 0.45.

⁶ Predictions were obtained with the *Interact* On-Line (Heise, 2002) by importing the relational-identity EPAs for each dyad and Lerner's (1983) estimations of EPA profiles for specific actions in the COPDAB database (Azar 1980).

⁷ The significance level was $p < .001$; additional canonical correlations were not significant. The significant canonical variates in each set correspond approximately to the conflict-cooperation scale developed by Azar and Lerner (1981); cooperation consists of good quiet actions, and conflict of bad active actions.

⁸ This is better than Lerner's (1983) results for several reasons. First, in the earlier work Lerner computed affect control theory predictions as approximations, in order to bypass the theory's time-consuming software, and this no longer is necessary with the powerful contemporary software. Second, the conflict-cooperation scale that Lerner (1983) used for his test was developed without regard to predictive capabilities, whereas the canonical variate in this analysis optimizes predictability. Third, in the earlier work Lerner simply averaged scale scores for the two response actions, whereas the canonical analysis weights EPAs of each response in a refined way.

Lerner (1983) also examined rule-of-thumb predictions—that a future behavior will be similar to recent behavior, and that a future behavior will be similar to the nation's average behavior in the region 1971-75. The affect control theory predictions were better than either of these atheoretical predictions. We found the same things in the new analyses.

⁹ Though we selected judiciously from sets of equivalent events to make exactly this point, the fact remains that the same kinds of events have been happening over and over in the relation between Israel and the Palestinians.