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Asymmetric Territorial Conflicts: Empirical Analysis

4.1 Procedures and rationale

In evaluating a formal model's predictive success we face inherent limitations in terms of measurement, case-selection, falsifiability of assumptions and predictions and control for additional variables. These difficulties are compounded in the case at hand since the posited causal mechanism involves a variable – ‘patience’ – which has not been, and probably cannot be, observed in its own right. Thus, an assessment of the model's causal validity can only be inferred from an analysis of its observable and measurable aspects.

To help cope with these obstacles, I adopt some fundamental principles of empirical evaluation, as presented by Morton (1999: 101), who divides the empirical inquiry of formal models into three stages: evaluation of assumptions, evaluation of predictions and evaluation of alternative models.

4.1.1 The unobservability of ‘patience’

In the formal model presented in the previous chapter, the core explanatory concept is ‘patience,’ an unobservable quantity. Clearly, this presents a challenge in testing the model's predictive validity since we have no way of measuring a direct relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Nevertheless, enough of the model's aspects are amenable to quantitative analysis for us to gain an understanding of its basic merit.

Moreover, since the model's predictions are longitudinal in nature, we have at our disposal a measurable – albeit implicit – independent variable: time. If the model successfully withstands analysis of its assumptions and longitudinal predictions, this should increase our
confidence in its basic merit, even if patience itself remains beyond the grasp of quantitative analysis.

Thus, the empirical forecasts that are tested below have been inferred from the structure of the formal model. Different unobservable processes could conceivably be responsible for these same observed patterns, where the behavioral properties of the model may correspond with the data, even though the model’s causal logic may actually be wrong. Until and unless a method for measuring ‘patience’ is devised, it appears that we must make do with this kind of suggestive evidence. Detailed qualitative historical research, though difficult to contemplate on a large scale, can help shed some light on the role of patience in a given conflict. Such a case study is carried out in the next chapter for the Israeli–Palestinian case.

4.1.2 Evaluation of assumptions and predictions

The primary role of assumption evaluation for a descriptive model is to verify whether the model does indeed provide a tenable explanation of the empirical phenomenon being studied. The predictions of a formal model are derived from its premises and structure. It is not enough, therefore, to see whether the model’s predictions fit our observations, since the model claims more than that some behavioral pattern will come about; it claims that this behavior will come about because of some empirical process that the model formally describes. Thus, if we want to gain confidence in the model’s success, we must make efforts to establish, to the extent possible, the truth of its premises.

To evaluate the model’s predictions, we must translate the formal model’s predicted trajectory into empirically verifiable hypotheses and answer several fundamental questions, such as: should we interpret the model as a Complete Data-Generating-Process (DGP) or only as a Partial DGP?\(^1\) The most common approach in the literature is to view a model as a Partial DGP, which must then be examined while controlling for other exogenous variables. This is the approach I adopt here. In this vein, I derive conclusions pertaining to observable variables from the formal model and describe these in terms of testable hypotheses.

4.1.3 Evaluation of alternative explanations

In the present study, there are actually two separate issues which arise in evaluating alternative explanations: first, how can a dynamic longitudinal model be compared with cross-sectional models? This matter is of particular importance, given the relative scarcity of dynamic models in the international relations literature and the importance of carrying out