

# Forecasting Conflict using Open Sources



Philip A. Schrodt  
University of Kansas

“Covering Conflict: The Media at War”  
Graduate School of Journalism  
University of California Berkeley

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# Outline

- Event data analysis—technical forecasting
- The media-policy interface
- Problems with contemporary intelligence analysis
- How you can make my job easier

## Reuters Chronology of 1990 Iraq-Kuwait Crisis - 1

July 17, 1990: RESURGENT IRAQ SENDS SHOCK WAVES THROUGH GULF ARAB STATES

Iraq President Saddam Hussein launched an attack on Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Tuesday, charging they had conspired with the United States to depress world oil prices through overproduction.

July 23, 1990: IRAQ STEPS UP GULF CRISIS WITH ATTACK ON KUWAITI MINISTER

Iraqi newspapers denounced Kuwait's foreign minister as a U.S. agent Monday, pouring oil on the flames of a Persian Gulf crisis Arab leaders are struggling to stifle with a flurry of diplomacy.

July 24, 1990: IRAQ WANTS GULF ARAB AID DONORS TO WRITE OFF WAR CREDITS

Debt-burdened Iraq's conflict with Kuwait is partly aimed at persuading Gulf Arab creditors to write off billions of dollars lent during the war with Iran, Gulf-based bankers and diplomats said.

# Major WEIS Categories

<b>01</b>	<b>Yield</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Reject</b>
<b>02</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Accuse</b>
<b>03</b>	<b>Consult</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Protest</b>
<b>04</b>	<b>Approve</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>Deny</b>
<b>05</b>	<b>Promise</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>Demand</b>
<b>06</b>	<b>Grant</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Warn</b>
<b>07</b>	<b>Reward</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>Threaten</b>
<b>08</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>Demonstrate</b>
<b>09</b>	<b>Request</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>Reduce Relationship</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Propose</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Expel</b>
		<b>21</b>	<b>Seize</b>
		<b>22</b>	<b>Force</b>

# WEIS Coding of 1990 Iraq-Kuwait Crisis

<u>Date</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Type of Action</u>
900717	IRQ	KUW	121	CHARGE
900717	IRQ	UAE	121	CHARGE
900723	IRQ	KUW	122	DENOUNCE
900724	IRQ	ARB	150	DEMAND
900724	IRQ	OPC	150	DEMAND
900725	IRQ	EGY	054	ASSURE
900727	IRQ	KUW	160	WARN
900731	IRQ	KUW	182	MOBILIZATION
900801	KUW	IRQ	112	REFUSE
900802	IRQ	KUW	223	MILITARY FORCE

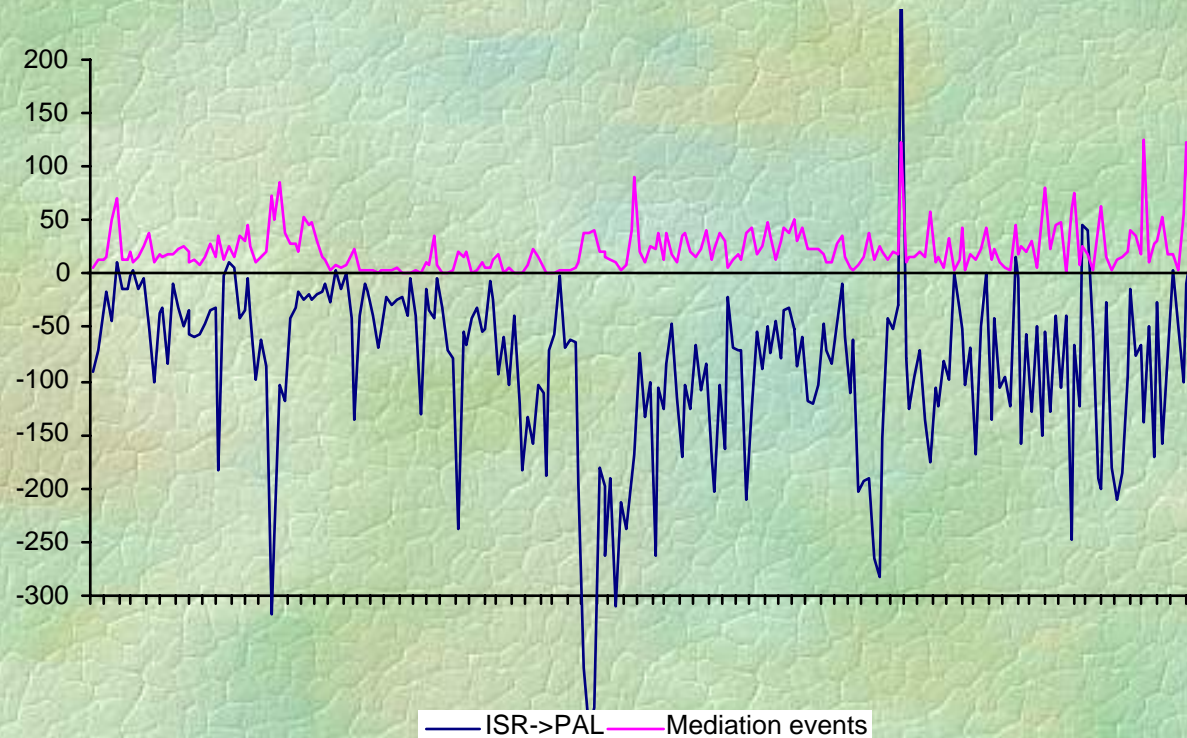
# An Example of Event Data

940609	NATO	BFR	094	CALL FOR
940609	USA	NATO	023	NEUTRAL COMM
940609	BFRSER	MOS	223	MIL ENGAGEME
940609	MOS	BFRSER	223	MIL ENGAGEME
940609	SER	BFR	012	RETREAT
940609	CAN	BFR	192	CUT ROUTINE
940609	BFRMOS	SER	073	GIVE OTHER A
940609	BFRCRO	SER	073	GIVE OTHER A
940609	FRN	BFR	041	PRAISE
940609	BFRSER	BFRMOS	221	NONINJURY DE
940609	USA	BFR	112	REFUSE
940609	USA	BFR	111	TURN DOWN
940609	USA	BFR	111	TURN DOWN
940609	USA	BFR	111	TURN DOWN
940610	BFR	INT	082	AGREE FUTURE
940610	SER	BFR	012	RETREAT
940610	FRN	EEC	112	REFUSE
940610	UNO	BFR	025	EXPLAIN POSI
940610	BFRSER	MOS	223	MIL ENGAGEME
940610	MOS	BFRSER	223	MIL ENGAGEME
940610	CRO	UNO	023	NEUTRAL COMM
940610	CRO	UNO	091	ASK INFORMAT
940610	BFRSER	SER	142	DENY ACTION
940611	UNO	BFR	025	EXPLAIN POSI
940611	BFRSER	MOS	121	CRITICIZE
940611	MOS	BFRSER	121	CRITICIZE

# Goldstein Scale for WEIS Events

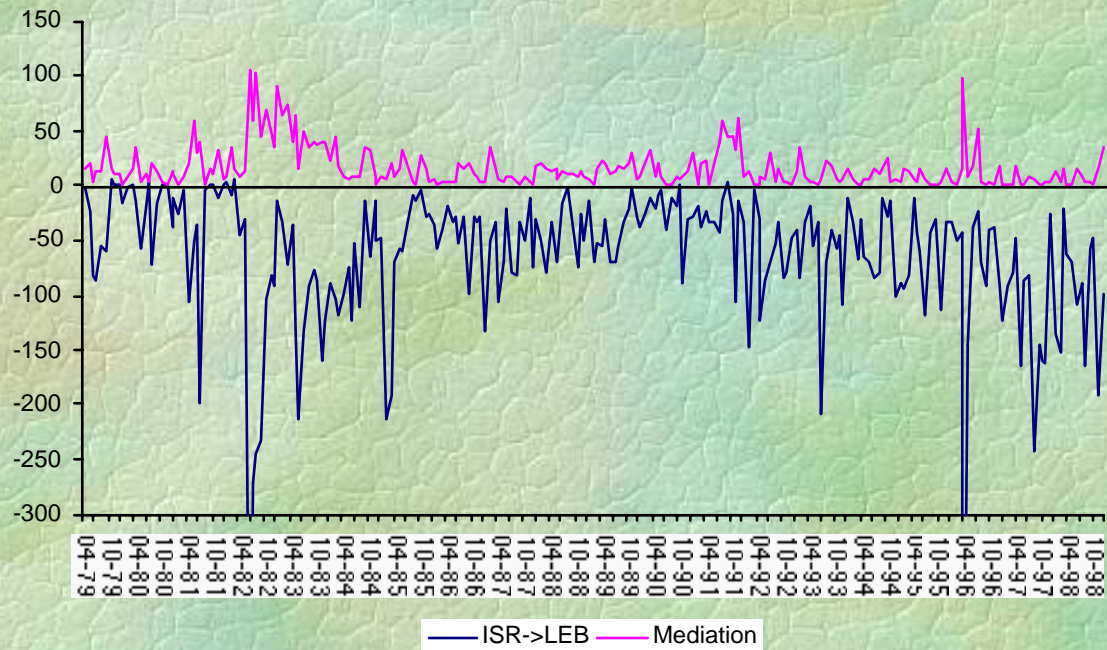
010: [1.0]	YIELD	110: [-4.0]	REJECT
011: [0.6]	SURRENDER	111: [-4.0]	TURN DOWN
012: [0.6]	RETREAT	112: [-4.0]	REFUSE
013: [2.0]	RETRACT	113: [-5.0]	DEFY LAW
014: [3.0]	ACCOMODATE, CEASEFIRE		
015: [5.0]	CEDE POWER		
		170: [-6.0]	THREATEN
020: [0.0]	COMMENT	171: [-4.4]	UNSPECIFIED THREAT
021: [-0.1]	DECLINE COMMENT	172: [-5.8]	NONMILITARY TRHEAT
022: [-0.4]	PESSIMISTIC COMMENT	173: [-7.0]	SPECIFIC THREAT
023: [-0.2]	NEUTRAL COMMENT	174: [-6.9]	ULTIMATUM
024: [0.4]	OPTIMISTIC COMMENT		
		220: [-9.0]	FORCE
070: [7.0]	REWARD	221: [-8.3]	NONINJURY DESTRUCTION
071: [7.4]	EXTEND ECON AID	222: [-8.7]	NONMIL DESTRUCTION
072: [8.3]	EXTEND MIL AID	223: [-10.0]	MILITARY ENGAGEMENT
073: [6.5]	GIVE OTHER ASSISTANCE		

# Israel-Palestine: Conflict and mediation 1979-98

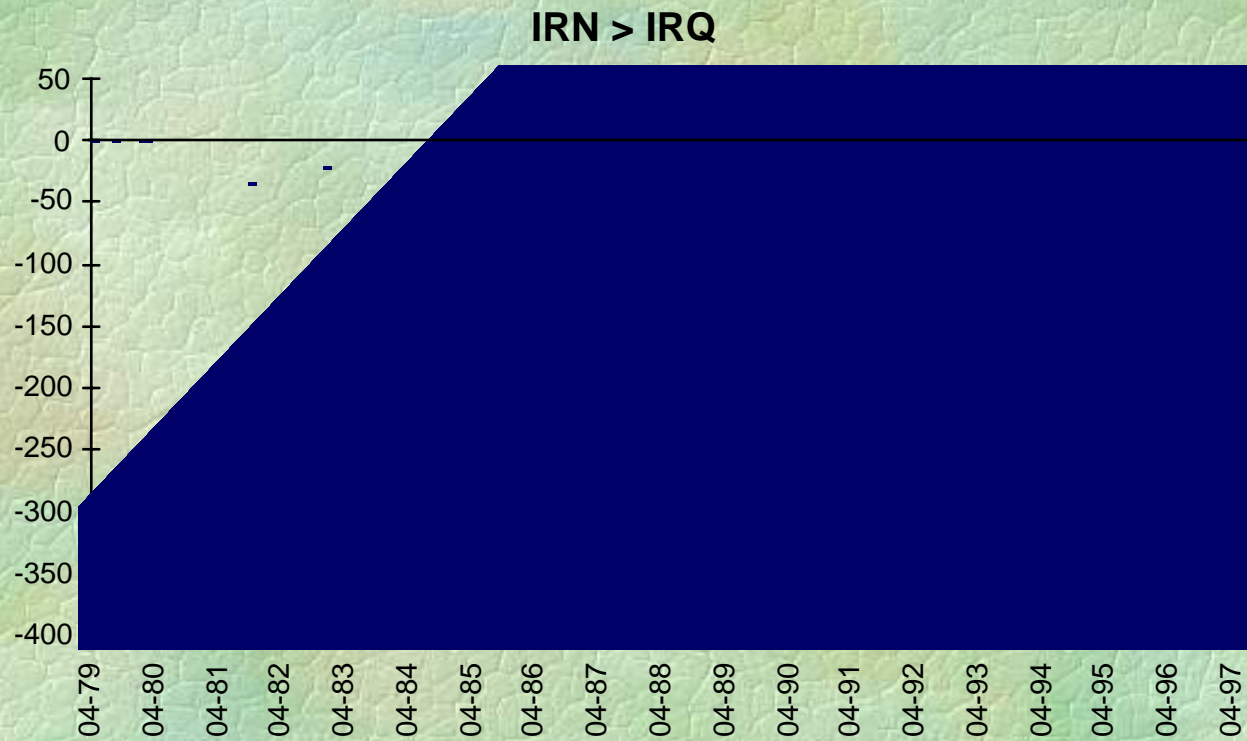




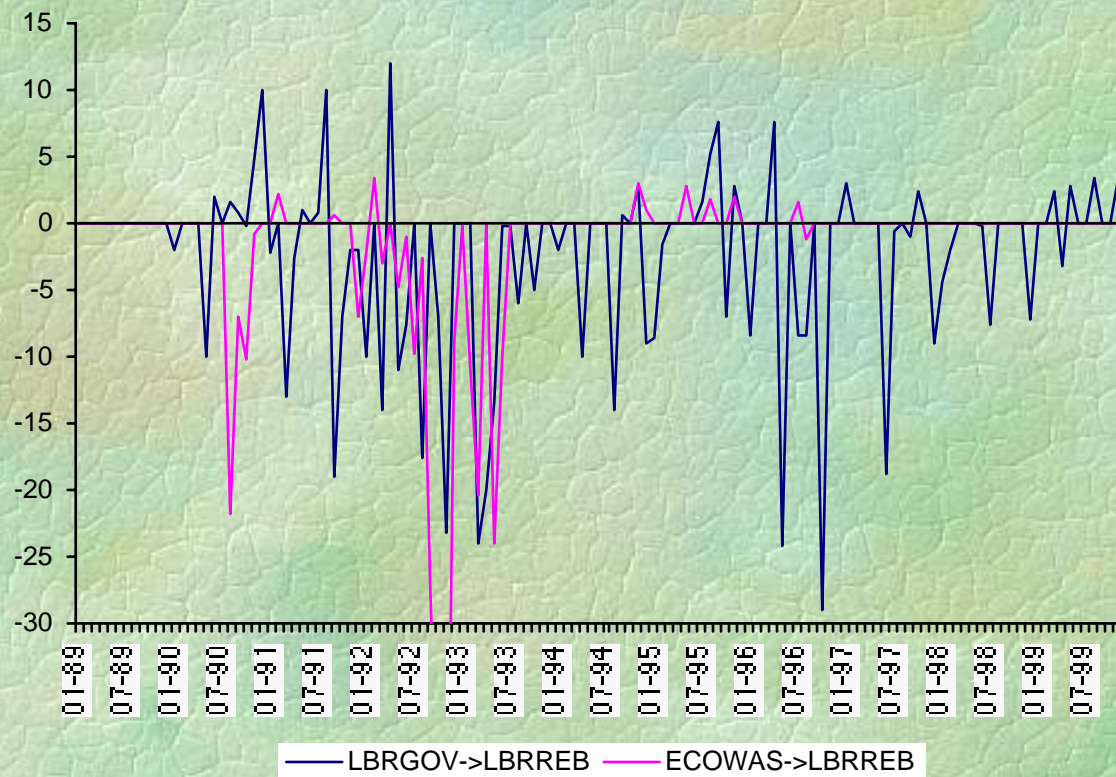
# Israel-Lebanon: Conflict and mediation 1979-98



# Goldstein-scaled series: Iran → Iraq 1979-97



# Goldstein series for Liberia and ECOWAS actions toward rebels, 1989-99



# Levels of conflict forecasting models used in policy-making

## ⇒ **Structural:**

predict the cases (countries or regions) most likely to experience conflict

## ⇒ **Dynamic:**

predict a probability of conflict breaking out at a known point in the future

## ⇒ **Counter-factual:**

predict how the change in some policy (e.g introduction of aid or peacekeepers) will affect the likelihood or magnitude of conflict

# Lead times for policy-relevant forecasting

(This is really, really important)

→ 1 to 6 months!

Any “prediction” less than 1 month is an autopsy, not a diagnosis

# Organizations developing conflict forecasting models

- Academic researchers
- Government agencies: Dept of Defense, CIA, State (?)
- Inter-governmental organizations: World Bank, FAO, UNICEF
- Non-governmental organizations: swisspeace, FEWER, Carnegie Foundation

# Early Warning vs. Intelligence

## Early Warning

- ⇒ Transparent sources and methods
- ⇒ Decentralized
- ⇒ International
- ⇒ Information sharing
- ⇒ Human security (welfare of others)

## Intelligence Analysis

- ⇒ Secret sources and methods
- ⇒ Centralized
- ⇒ National
- ⇒ Information hoarding
- ⇒ National security (welfare of the state)

### Source:

Heinz Krummenacher, FAST project, swisspeace Conference on Global Conflict Monitoring, Bern, 6 March 2003

# Media-Policy Interface

- Policy maker would *far* rather watch CNN than read an intelligence report
- Almost all new ideas enter the U.S. policy community through three (maybe four) sources
  - *New York Times*
  - *Washington Post*
  - *Wall Street Journal*
  - *Economist* (indirectly)



# Problems facing intelligence agencies

∞ Competition for the attention of policy makers

∞ Information overload—”drinking from a firehose”

- For strategic analysis, open source information may actually be superior to classified information because it is better filtered

∞ Tremendous expansion of areas being monitored following end of Cold War

- Despite 90% focus on USSR, collapse was not predicted

∞ Limited resources

- Total *analytical* budget of only about \$3-billion; remaining \$27-billion of “intelligence spending” goes to hardware

## Problems facing intelligence agencies, cont.

☞ Overworked and isolated; limited field experience

☞ Subject to bureaucratic and political pressure

- Despite what Rumsfeld, Cheney, Roberts, etc tell you
- But you already knew that...

Upshot:

☞ It isn't James Bond

☞ And it sure isn't Austin Powers

# Problems using conventional media sources

## ∞ News as entertainment

- Don't trust any news story where more was spent on the special effects than was spent on the reporting

## ∞ “Media fatigue”

- Affects newspapers more than news wires

# Number of stories found with “Palestinian killed” NEXIS search string

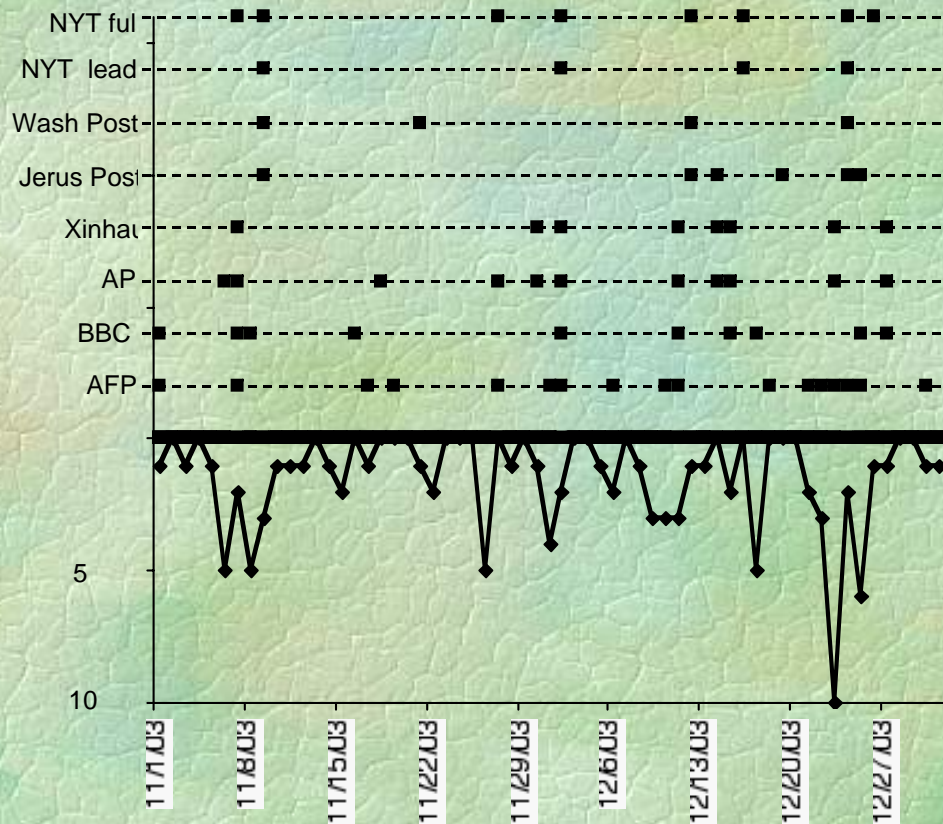
## Newspaper

↻ <i>Los Angeles Times</i>	3
↻ <i>New York Times</i>	4
↻ <i>Washington Post</i>	4
↻ <i>Jerusalem Post</i>	6
↻ <i>New York Times, full text</i>	8

## Wire Service

↻ Xinhau	8
↻ BBC (Factiva)	10
↻ Associated Press	11
↻ Agence France Presse	18

# Comparison of newspaper and wire service coverage of Palestinian deaths, Nov-Dec 2003



# Problems using conventional media sources

## ∞ Virtual absence of coverage in low-priority regions

- a.k.a. “Africa” and “Central Asia”
- “Parachute journalism”

## ∞ Unwillingness to use common sense

- Two mistakes when covering foreign cultures:
  - assuming everything is completely different (Margaret Mead problem);
  - assuming everything is the same (LBJ problem)
- Dr. Spock Solution (Benjamin, not the Vulcan):  
you know more than you think you know

# Alternative sources to the usual suspects

## **Guideline:**

- “Don’t trust the analysis of anyone who has to be met at the airport”
- You need to have reliable sources who are there before the story gets interesting

## **Alternatives**

- Stringers
- Academics with recent field experience
- NGO workers