

comparative analysis. (See examples on preceding page.)

The interpretation of trend graphs is necessarily comparative, usually over time and within states, as patterns will mean different things for different states, regime types, and cultures. In a democratic or traditionally localized society, for example, a low authority trend may not suggest vulnerability. In that same state, however, a declining authority trend will signal an increased risk of instability, as it is low relative to its own historical baseline.

Occasionally, comparisons may be revealing, especially among uniquely similar states or historical cases of instability. A trend comparison between postcommunist systems in China and Vietnam, for example, may yield insight. Similarly, the analysis of historical patterns in East European states before the collapse of their communist systems may test conclusions drawn from within-state analysis.

The trend graph also hints at likely scenario types. A country with resilience- and legitimacy-centered vulnerabilities—as in the hypothetical examples in the foregoing graph—is less likely to experience a crisis of authority. These patterns of vulnerability can suggest that the probability of a crisis has increased.

There still remains the problem of identifying triggers, a difficult challenge for two reasons. First, triggers historically have been difficult to predict. There was no reason to think

that the removal of fuel subsidies would cause protests in Burma in 2007, for example, or that the self-immolation of the street vendor in Tunisia would precipitate the events it did.

Second, neither the probability nor the impact of potential trigger events is constant. Instead, different combinations of declining trends enable and shape different kinds of triggers. Police corruption that constrains authority, for example, may raise the probability that a confrontation will develop into a protest and increase the size and effect of that protest once it has begun. As a result, conventional probability-and-impact assessments of specific trigger events are misleading. They assume that characteristics of triggers are constant when they are not.

Despite these challenges, triggers can be estimated. As social catalysts, they have wider meaning only insofar as they occur in contexts primed for reaction and interaction. Trigger analysis should focus on contexts instead of specific events. (This context of local conditions is similar to the opportunity dynamic of the behavioral definition of instability.)

The four clearest practical contexts in which triggers might spark instability are elite division, policy deadlock, public awareness, and social trust. Within *authority*, a divided elite is much more vulnerable to sudden stresses than a united one. Within *resilience*, policy deadlock paralyzes a state's ability to respond to change. And, within *legitimacy*, public awareness and social trust—information and a way to discuss it—facilitate popular mobilization.

These local conditions set the context for trigger events. If conditions would allow a trend-enabled trigger to spread, its probability of sparking instability events rises. Conversely, if they would not, an event may occur in a context of vulnerability without developing into a trigger. The below table presents a hypothetical pattern analysis of practical conditions, coded along a defined scale.

The final estimate of probability draws on both broad trends of vulnerability over time and the degree to which practical conditions are affected by the catalytic action of triggers. The estimate includes absolute and

	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4
Practical conditions	8.0	7.5	7.0	6.5
Elite unity	9	9	9	8
Policy pragmatism	6	5	5	4
Public uninformed	8	7	6	6
Social suspicion	9	9	8	8

10.0 = Highest; 0.0 = Lowest

relative assessments of the probability of each scenario type emerging. Importantly, the judgments remain those of the analyst, and they are not prescriptive but encourage the transparency, debate, wider considerations, and assumption checks of good analytic tradecraft.

Impact: Responses and Consequences

The impact of state instability is a function of group responses and consequences. Unlike probability, which focuses on a single point of time (the onset of instability), impact centers on an extended period of time (the duration of instability). As a result, it is a relative mess of contingent futures, multiplying over several “rounds” of interaction. Only first-round responses and consequences can be estimated; second-round estimates lose their specificity.

The first-round analysis of actors uses a two-by-two matrix to develop course-of-action types. Like scenario types, these are more useful as generic futures than as specific scenarios. Identified through brainstorming and discussion, the two most important variables affecting a group’s response can be joined to form two crossed axes, creating four conceptually distinct potential course-of-action types. The matrix below provides an example of options available to a state neighboring another in distress. The responses of multiple actors such as key lead-

ers, social groups, or military units may be of equal importance to policymakers and can also be the subject of analysis.

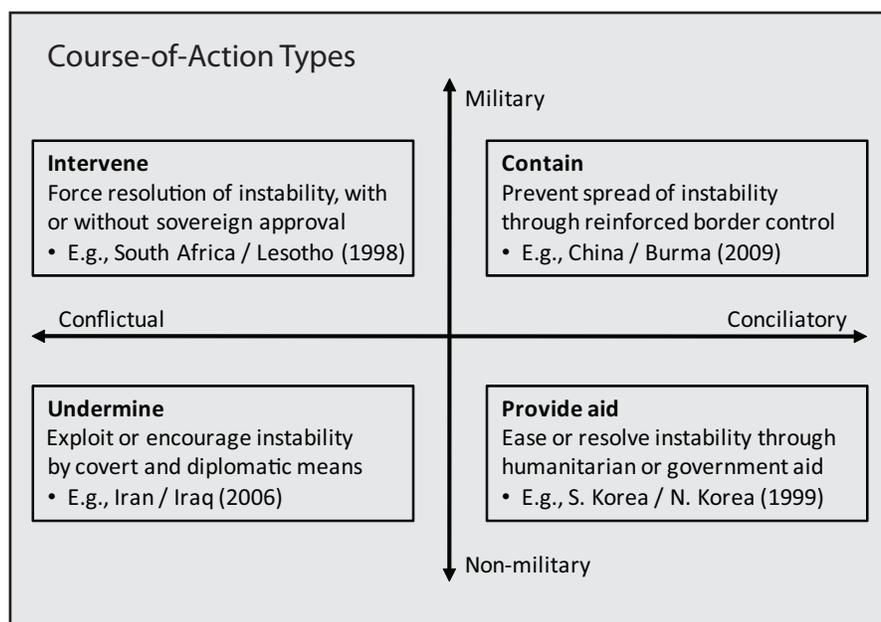
These are only generic options and have little meaning outside of the context of each scenario type. Context shapes the operational details of each course of action. Within a neighbor’s response, for example, different kinds of military units might be deployed to secure the borders in a crisis of legitimacy than would be deployed in an intervention to stem the flow of refugees in a crisis of authority. The table in the upper left of the next page presents a framework combining response types with context.

This framework enables judgments of impact that are critical to policymakers, planners, and strategists. Read by column, it identifies a group’s most likely and least likely

response types, setting baseline assumptions for planning. Read by row, it provides a fragment that, when combined with other groups’ courses of action, establishes baseline expectations of particular scenario types.

A similar approach can be used to estimate consequences. Here, however, the range of consequences cannot be reduced to four “types.” The impersonal effects of instability—crime, social division, deteriorating infrastructure, etc.—are too scattered, scenario-dependent, varied, and of irregular importance to shrink into just four categories.

A better organizing principle is policymaker interest—a focus not on the details of consequences but on the conditions needed to implement potential policy initiatives. For instability, this interest is represented



Course-of-Action Types in Context

Country A's Potential Responses to a Crisis in Country B

	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4
Crisis of authority	Very likely response	Potential response	Potential response	Potential response
Crisis of resilience	Potential response	Potential response	Potential response	Unlikely response
Crisis of legitimacy	Potential response	Likely response	Potential response	Potential response

Response 1: Intervene—Mobilize to resolve crisis by force.
 Response 2: Contain—Deploy additional border security.
 Response 3: Provide aid—Convene a donor's conference.
 Response 4: Undermine—Provide arms to Country B's dissidents.

Policy Values—Risk Evaluation

Crisis of legitimacy	Crisis of resilience	Crisis of authority		
			Sovereignty	Interests
			Security	
			Well being	
			Safety of non-combatants	Values
			Regulated use of force	
			Rule of law / public order	
			Individual rights	
			Basic needs	
			Private opportunity	
			Public regulation	
			Representative government	

most reliably by doctrine. The US Army Field Manual 3.07, *Stability Operations*, identifies 38 stability tasks that could be used to answer two of policymakers' most difficult questions: "Do we need to act?" and "When is it best to act?"¹⁹

In response to the first question, doctrinal stability tasks can be reframed to represent policy values and then judged according to the degree to which they are at risk. Together with more traditional interests, this provides a means to estimate stakes. Values and interests likely to be at risk imply a need to act; those likely to remain safe imply that other options may remain open. (See table on the right.)²⁰

In response to the second question, stability tasks can be reframed to represent key conditions and then judged by the degree to which they would

help or hinder a proposed policy. This leads to estimates of timing. Conditions challenging a proposal suggest a need to wait; conditions favorable to it imply an opportunity to act. (See table on next page, which shows select stability tasks in the context of conditions in a location.)²¹

But these tools are limited. They estimate only the first round of many in the likely interactions between groups and consequences. Rapidly multiplying contingent futures prevent a second- or third-round estimate. This is an opportunity for future methodological development.

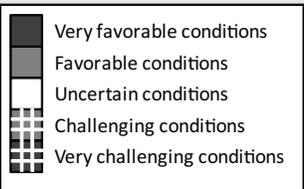
The final estimate of impact not only presents the most dangerous and the most favorable (least dangerous) group course-of-action and consequence types, but it also brings them together to develop the most

dangerous and the most favorable scenario types. Along the way, it ensures transparency, debate, wider consideration, and assumptions checks in a process that remains centered on the analyst.

Overall Estimate: So What?

Together, these tools could be used to generate a summary estimate of state instability for policymakers that not only outlines probabilities of broadly

Conditions for Policy Options

			
Crisis of legitimacy	Crisis of resilience	Crisis of authority	
			Capability of security forces
			Security of CBRN hazards
			Capability of police forces
			Capability of justice system
			Status of essential svcs
			Degree of dislocation
			Capability of econ mgmt
			Potential for econ growth
			Quality of local govt

defined threats but also identifies the most likely, most dangerous, highest risk, and most favorable instability scenario types; the likely responses of key actors; and an evaluation of conditions that would help shape their decisions.

These judgments reach several audiences. They support policymakers with a more com-

plete estimate of a potential instability crisis. They support planners with a planning case (most likely), hedging case (most dangerous), and testing cases (combinations of others). And, last, they support strategists by identifying challenges or conditions likely to result from instability ahead of time, allowing them to develop strategies earlier, before a crisis inspires a rush to action.

These needs are real. Almost two weeks into the protests that destabilized Egypt in early 2011, for instance, a frustrated American official vented to David Sanger of the *New York Times*. “This is what happens when you get caught by surprise,” he or she said. “We’ve had endless strategy sessions for the past two years on Mid-east Peace, on containing Iran,” the official continued, “and how many of them factored in the possibility that Egypt... moves from stability to turmoil? None.”²²

To expand on the official’s words, the early response to “Arab Spring” is what happens when policymakers are caught not only by surprise, but without adequate analytic ground to stand on. In hindsight, it is hard to conclude that a structured qualitative estimate of state instability for each major country in the region would not have given American strategists what they needed to better prepare for instability in Egypt and across the Middle East.

Reducing Uncertainty

For all of these potential benefits, the approach outlined here remains imperfect. Even in the hands of outstanding analysts, it would probably not achieve the prediction rates reported by quantitative models like the PITF. And it cannot forecast exact operational details or second-round consequences. By necessity, state instability will remain to some degree unpredictable.

But, as Sherman Kent, the father of estimative intelligence, once wrote, “estimating is what you do when you do not know.”²³ State instability may remain at least partially unpredictable, but it need not remain uninvestigated. The structured qualitative method advanced here takes another step toward removing some of that uncertainty; opening up the analytic process to increase transparency, debate, wider consideration, and assumptions checks; providing policymakers, planners, and strategists the intelligence support they need; and reducing not just surprise, but the policy paralysis that too often follows state instability.



Endnotes

1. Kimberly Dozier, "Obama 'Disappointed' by Intel on Arab Unrest," Associated Press, February 4, 2011. This article is available online at http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-202_162-7317044.html.
2. Ibid.
3. Rachel Martin, "Egypt Unrest: Didn't U.S. Intelligence See it Coming?" National Public Radio, February 5, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/02/05/133510910/intelligence-officials-face-hard-questions-on-egypt>.
4. For a helpful introduction to some of these approaches, see Frederick Barton and Karin von Hippel, "Early Warning? A Review of Conflict Prediction Models and Systems," PCR Project Special Briefing, Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 2008. This paper is available for download at <http://csis.org/publication/early-warning>.
5. Jack Goldstone, "Using Quantitative and Qualitative Methods to Forecast Instability," Special Report 204, United States Institute of Peace, March 2008.
6. Sean O'Brien, "Anticipating the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: An Early Warning Approach to Conflict and Instability Analysis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 6 (2002); Sean O'Brien, "Crisis Early Warning and Decision Support: Contemporary Approaches and Thoughts on Future Research," *International Studies Review* 12 (2010); and Jack Goldstone et al., "A Global Forecasting Model for Political Instability," *American Journal of Political Science* 54, no.1 (2010). Another significant predictive model developed outside of government is the University of Maryland's biennial report: Joseph Hewitt, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Ted Gurr, *Peace and Conflict*, 2010, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2010.
7. David Carment et al., "The 2006 Country Indicators for Foreign Policy: Opportunities and Challenges for Canada," *Canadian Foreign Policy* 13, no.1 (2006); David Carment, "2008/2009 Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Fragile States Index," *Dispatch* 7 no.1 (2009); Economist Intelligence Unit, "Social Unrest," *EIU Views-Wire*, 2011 <http://viewswire.eiu.com/site_info.asp?info_name=social_unrest_table&page=nodes&rf=0>; "About Eurasia Group's Global Political Risk Index," Reuters Blog; Andrew Marshall, Aug 2010 <blogs.reuters.com/andrew-marshall>(no longer available); Susan Rice and Stewart Patrick, "Index of State Weakness in the Developing World," Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 2008 (This paper is available for download at http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/02_weak_states_index.aspx); Monty Marshall and Benjamin Cole, "Global Report 2009: Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility," Center for Systemic Peace, George Mason University, 2009 (This paper is available for download at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/peace.htm>); "The Failed States Index 2010 Interactive Grid," Fund for Peace 2010 (This paper is available for download at <http://www.fundforpeace.org/global/?q=fsi-grid2010>).
8. O'Brien, "The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly," 804; O'Brien, "Crisis Early Warning," 94–97; Goldstone et al., "A Global Forecasting Model," 196–7.
9. The rankings for the State Fragility Index are unusual due to the index's ranking system, which can group several states together in one tier; the ranking used is the highest (least stable) possible for each state's group, thus allowing two states in the same group to share the same rank. (For the purpose of the table on page 3, this gives "tied" states the benefit of the doubt, or the highest possible ranking.) "The Failed States Index 2007," *Foreign Policy* 161 (2007); "The Failed States Index 2008," *Foreign Policy* 167 (2008); "The Failed States Index," *Foreign Policy* 173 (2009); "The Failed States Index 2010," http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/21/2010_failed_states_index_interactive_map_and_rankings; Monty Marshall and Jack Goldstone, "Global Report on Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility 2007," *Foreign Policy Bulletin* (Winter 2007); Monty Marshall and Benjamin Cole, "Global Report on Conflict, Governance and State Fragility 2008," *Foreign Policy Bulletin* 18, no.1 (2008); Marshall and Cole, "Global Report 2009"; Economist Intelligence Unit, "Social Unrest"; and Rice and Patrick, "Index of State Weakness."

10. Barton and von Hippel report that “one [US government] official referred to the National Intelligence Council (NIC) watch list as ‘conventional wisdom watch.’” Barton and von Hippel, “Early Warning?” 11.
11. O’Brien argues that effective support must include more than warning: “Forecasts of impending crises alone are insufficient; decisionmakers require informed insights into how the options at their disposal might mitigate, or even exacerbate, the crisis.” O’Brien, “Crisis Early Warning,” 88.
12. For more on the use of structural analogy models, see Goldstone, “Using Quantitative and Qualitative Models.” For an example of a Delphi forecast of instability, see the focus on unification-by-absorption in Park Young-ho and Kim Hyeong-ki, “2010 Unification Clock: When We Will See a Unified Korea?” Korea Institute for National Unification, December 2010. (This paper is available for download at [http://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/pub/pub_02_01.jsp?page=1&num=85&mode=view&field=&text=&order=&dir=&bid=DATA05&ses=.](http://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/pub/pub_02_01.jsp?page=1&num=85&mode=view&field=&text=&order=&dir=&bid=DATA05&ses=;))
13. Central Intelligence Agency, “Indicators or Signposts of Change,” *A Tradecraft Primer: Structured Analytic Techniques for Improving Intelligence Analysis*, March 2009, 12–13 <www.cia.gov>; Jonathan Goodhand, Tony Vaux, and Robert Walker, “Conducting Conflict Assessments: Guidance Notes,” UK Department for International Development, Jan 2002; Suzanne Verstegen, Luc van de Goor, and Jeroen de Zeeuw, “The Stability Assessment Framework: Designing Integrated Responses for Security, Governance and Development,” The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 2005. (This paper is available for download at [http://www.ssrnetwork.net/document_library/detail/3854/the-stability-assessment-framework-designing-integrated-responses-for-security-governance-and-development.](http://www.ssrnetwork.net/document_library/detail/3854/the-stability-assessment-framework-designing-integrated-responses-for-security-governance-and-development))
14. J. Eli Margolis, “Understanding Political Stability and Instability,” *Civil Wars* 12, no.3 (2010).
15. *Ibid.*, 332.
16. *Ibid.*, 337–38.
17. Goldstone et al., “A Global Forecasting Model,” 191–92.
18. Researchers in other fields rely on similarly artificial heuristic types. The most helpful typology of authoritarian regimes, for example, often classifies them as mixed, or “hybrid.” Barbara Geddes, “What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999); Barbara Geddes, “Authoritarian Breakdown: Empirical Test of a Game Theoretic Argument,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, GA, September 1999; and Natasha Ezrow and Erica Frantz, *Dictators and Dictatorships: Understanding Authoritarian Regimes and their Leaders* (New York: Continuum, 2011).
19. Chapter three introduces these stability tasks. US Army, “Stability Operations,” *Field Manual* 3-07, October 2008.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. David Sanger, “As Mubarak Digs in, U.S. Policy in Egypt is Complicated,” *New York Times*, February 5, 2011.
23. Quoted in Loch Johnson, “Glimpses into the Gems of American Intelligence: The President’s Daily Brief and the National Intelligence Estimate,” *Intelligence and National Security* 23, no.3 (2008): 351.

