Targeting of Infrastructure in the Middle East Actor Coding Methodology

This document explains how actors are identified and coded in the Targeting of Infrastructure in the Middle East (TIME) database. The Targeting of Infrastructure in the Middle East project focuses on tracking and analyzing the targeting of civilian and environmental infrastructure by parties to conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

In addition, the document covers how the project assesses and codes for means, intentionality, and active vs. collateral damage.

Coding for Actors in the TIME Database

The TIME database tracks the range of actors involved in the destruction or targeting of infrastructure for the case conflicts. This includes those alleged to have conducted attacks and those affected by them where known.

For actors alleged to have conducted attacks, the TIME database includes national/local, international, non-governmental, civilian, tribal/communal actors, and political militias.

For affected populations, these include those persons or communities identified in sources as suffering harm.

Identifying actors is frequently difficult owing to rapidly changing conflict dynamics, including shifting affiliations, alliances, entry of new actors, and growth of quasi-state and private militias. We maintain general classifications of actors perpetrating attacks and actors being affected to enable comparability among countries. While the project seeks to maximize comparability between countries in the database by maintaining general classifications for actors, more specific actor information in the database is provided for each country to illustrate the unique conflict dynamics that exist and the different hybrid combinations of actors. Therefore, the actor classifications and the way actors are coded in the database attempts to bridge the need for both generalizability and specificity in actor coding, recognizing that classifications of actors require iterative adjustments.

Which actors are included in the TIME database?

The TIME database includes five broad categories of actors conducting attacks:

- **Internal National Government**: actors operating under state authority as recognized by the international community. While non-state armed groups and movements may end up wielding state-like authority, unless they receive international recognition, they are coded as non-state armed actors.
- **External National Government**: actors operating under an outside state's authority – e.g. Turkish armed forces in Syria and in Libya; Russian and Iranian forces in Syria
- **International Coalition**: actors operating under the authority of a coalition of countries or an intergovernmental military alliance – e.g., NATO forces in Libya

- **Internal Non-State Group**: a broad range of actors including non-state armed groups, political militias, and movements
- **External Non-State Group**: a broad range of actors including non-state armed groups and political militias with origins outside of the conflict-affected state.

In addition to actors conducting attacks, the database uses six broad categories to capture those affected by attacks, as well as the category of civilians.

- **Internal National Government**: actors operating under state authority
- **External National Government**: actors operating under an outside state's authority - e.g., Turkish armed forces in Syria
- **International Coalition**: actors operating under the authority of a coalition of countries or an intergovernmental military alliance – e.g., NATO forces
- **Internal Non-State Group**: broad range of actors including non-state armed groups and political militias
- **External Non-State Group**: a broad range of actors including non-state armed groups and political militias with origins outside of the conflict state
- **Civilians**: actors with unknown affiliations

How are actors coded and integrated into the TIME database?

For each incident in the database, researchers code for the actors perpetrating the attack and those affected by the attacks. For more information on the country-specific actor coding methodology, refer to the country documents.

It is important to note that while there are shown three actor categories for both actors involved in and actors targeted by the attack, the country datasets do not include information for all three categories. Rather, the Iraq, Syria, Libya, and oPt/Israel datasets include the Type of Actor and Actor categories for actors involved and actors targeted. The Yemen dataset includes the Category of Actor and Actor categories for actors involved and actors targeted.

Actors Undertaking Targeting

1. Type of Actor Involved in Destruction:

The Type of Actor Involved in Destruction refers to the type of actor responsible for the targeting of the infrastructure. The coding draws from the five broad categories of actors discussed above. Based on the event description, researchers categorize and code actors as either internal national government, external national government, international coalition, internal non-state group, or external non-state group.

2. Category of Actor Involved in Destruction:

The category of actor perpetrating the attack is recorded in the Actor_Des_Category column. The column codes for actors using a mix of common and country-specific terms. For example, if the Type of Actor Involved in the Destruction is coded as internal non-state group a common term used to categorize the actor among countries may be political militias. Additionally, if the Type

of Actor Involved in the Destruction is coded as international coalition a country-specific term used to categorize the actor may be Saudi-led coalition, as is the case for the conflict in Yemen.

3. Actor Involved in the Destruction:

The Actor Involved in Destruction column refers to a particular group responsible for the targeting of the infrastructure. To capture the conflict dynamics of each country in the database, a prescribed set of coding terms is not ascribed to this column. Rather, based on the event description, researchers code either the specific name or the type of group involved depending on the detail in the description. If the name is provided in the event descriptions, researchers may code, for example, ISIS, United States, or Al-Jedaan tribe. If no name is provided in the event descriptions, researchers code for the kind of group, for example, rebels in Syria.

Actors Affected by Targeting

1. Type of Actor Targeted:

The Type of Actor Targeted refers to the type of group the attack on infrastructure harms. The coding draws from the six broad categories of targeted actors. Based on the event description, researchers categorize and code these actors as either internal national government, international coalition, external national government, internal non-state group, external non-state group, or unknown.

2. Category of Actor Targeted:

The category of actor affected by the attack is coded in the Actor_Targeted_Category column. Like the Actor_Des_Category column, the category of actor is coded using a mix of either common or country-specific terms. For example, if the Type of Actor Targeted is coded as unknown a common term used to categorize the actor targeted among countries may be civilians. Additionally, if the Type of Actor Targeted is coded as internal non-state group a country-specific term used to categorize the actor targeted may be Houthi rebels.

3. Actor Targeted:

The Actor Targeted column refers to the group affected by the attack. Like the Actor Involved in Destruction column, to express country-specific conflict dynamics, a common set of coding terms among countries are not ascribed to this column. Therefore, based on the event description, researchers code the specific name or the type of group involved depending on the detail in the description. If a name is provided in the event description, researchers may code, for example, Man-Made River Authority, ISIS, or Libyan National Army. If no name is provided in the event descriptions, researchers may code, for example, farmers.

What means do actors use to target infrastructure?

Parties to a conflict use a wide variety of weapons at their disposal to target infrastructure, therefore, the TIME database tracks a range of weapons to provide a detailed picture of how infrastructure is targeted. In addition to coding for the actors perpetrating attacks on

infrastructure, the TIME database also codes for the weapons used by these actors, which the database refers to as "means".

How are means coded in the Database?

The means used by parties to the conflict to target infrastructure are coded under the Means column in the TIME database. Based on the incident descriptions, the means used to target infrastructure is assigned and coded. General categories of means of targeting include (but are not limited to):

- Airstrikes
- Armed violence, which refers to fighting that also affects infrastructure, often indirectly.
- Arson
- Drone Strikes
- Explosive Weapons: bombs, missiles, mortars, rockets, artillery, IEDs.
- Gunfire
- Landmine
- Sea Mine
- Mechanical means of destroying houses, soils, trees, solar panels, and crops: bulldozers, armed vehicles, vandalism.

Parties to the conflict may use a combination of weapons when targeting infrastructure. If this is the case for a specific incident, researchers use a "/" to separate the weapons used when coding for a combination of weapons.

Intentionality to harm a specific group/population

The TIME database includes the intentions of actors to harm a specific group with an attack on infrastructure only when this is reported in the sources as such. Actors perpetrating an attack on infrastructure may intend to harm a specific group in the attack. Likewise, an attack on infrastructure may occur, but the actor may not have intended to harm the group affected by the attack.

How is intentionality coded in the TIME database?

The intentions of an actor when perpetrating an attack against a group are integrated into the TIME database in the Intentionality column. Intentionality refers to the intention of an actor to harm a specific group in an attack. Based on the event description, researchers code for intentionality using two broad categories:

- **Intentional**: the Actor Involved in Destruction planned to harm the group affected by the attack on infrastructure
- **Unintentional**: the Actor Involved in Destruction did not plan to harm or destroy the group affected by the attack on infrastructure

Based on the incident description, researchers code intentionality as either intentional or unintentional. Where, as in most instances, intentionality is not known, this column is left blank.

Note that assessments of intentionality reflect the underlying sources; the dataset is not intended as a legal finding or assessment.

Active or Collateral Damage regarding infrastructure

The TIME database also captures the actor's intention to damage or destroy infrastructure. Like harm caused to a specific group, an actor may intentionally or unintentionally harm infrastructure.

How is Active or Collateral Damage coded in the Database?

The intentions of an actor when targeting infrastructure are integrated into the TIME database in the Active v. Collateral column. The Active v. Collateral column refers to the specific piece of infrastructure targeted in the attack and if it was the intended target of the destruction. Based on the event description, researchers code for intended damage using two broad categories:

- **Active**: the infrastructure damaged or destroyed was the intended target
- **Collateral**: something else was targeted but infrastructure was damaged or destroyed because of the incident

Based on the incident description, researchers code damage to infrastructure as either active or collateral.

"Unknown" coding: What is done if information on actors, means, intentionality, and active or Collateral Damage is not available?

Given the differences among sources in the level of detail and information included in their incident descriptions, not all incidents provided information on actors, means, intentionality, or active v. collateral damage. For incidents where one or more of these categories or information were missing, researchers code unknown in the relevant columns. This is the most frequent outcome for most sources.