

# **Religion, Civil War, and International Order**

**Monica Duffy Toft**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Monica Duffy Toft** is an Associate Professor of Public Policy at the Kennedy School at Harvard University. She holds a PhD and MA from the University of Chicago and a BA in political science and Slavic languages and literatures from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She was a research intern at the RAND Corporation and served in the U.S. Army in southern Germany as a Russian voice interceptor. Her research interests include international security, nationalism, religion, and ethnic violence, civil and interstate wars, the relationship between demography and national security, and military and strategic planning. She is the author of two book manuscripts, a monograph, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and Territory*, and an edited volume, *The Fog of Peace: Strategic and Military Planning Under Uncertainty*. She is finishing a manuscript on the durable settlement of civil wars, *Peace through Security: The Durable Settlement of Civil Wars*, and starting a book on religion and global politics.

## **Religion, Civil War, and International Order**

This article addresses the question of why religion becomes a central issue in some civil wars whereas in others—even many of those whose primary combatants identify strongly with a particular religion—it has not. This question is important because religious civil wars are costly to the contending actors (both in the short term and the long term) and are more likely to affect regional and perhaps even international stability. I argue that religion is more likely to become central in civil wars in which threatened leaders can increase their chances of survival by invoking religion. I show that, as a proportion of all civil wars, the number of religious civil wars has been increasing. I also address the puzzle of why Islam is so much more likely to be implicated in a civil war in which religion has moved from a peripheral to a central issue than other religions. The article begins by introducing its central theoretical puzzles, and then proceeds to test competing arguments against a statistical analysis and a case study: the long civil war in Sudan. The article concludes with theoretical and policy implications, along with an agenda for further research.

## Religion, Civil War, and International Order

Religion is not dead, nor is it dying. In fact, religion has experienced a resurgence, and with that resurgence has come an increase in violence and war. Al-Qaida premised its attacks of September 11, 2001, on religious principles and civil wars rage between Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka, between Hindus and Muslims in India, and among Muslims in Iraq.

This article outlines the conditions under which religion becomes a central element in some civil wars but not in others.<sup>1</sup> Religion has always played a role in violent contests, ranging from individual duels to mass conflicts between empires or states. But what is that role? And what general principles and policies may we derive from a greater understanding of the link between religious belief, practice, and identity and civil war?

Since the end of the Cold War the subject of religion and organized violence has been increasingly prominent in international politics.<sup>2</sup> Yet the literature is still relatively undeveloped. Much of it either focuses on terrorism<sup>3</sup> or tests Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations"

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1. For the purpose of developing a general explanation, "central" means that the combatants had to be fighting over whether the state (or a region of the state) would be ruled according to a specific religious tradition (more on this below).

2. Cf. Douglas Johnston, *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); the special issue of *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (December 2000); and Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001). For some recent works that assess the resurgence of religion into public life see Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); David Westerlund, ed., *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996); Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1999); Susanne H. Rudolph and James Piscatori, *Transnational Religion and Fading States* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1997).

3. This literature is quite extensive, three of the best works include Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993), Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001); and Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Ecco/Harper Collins, 2003).

thesis.<sup>4</sup> More general theoretical approaches are still lacking. This essay therefore has two aims. The first aim is to present an empirical overview of the role of religion in civil wars since 1940.<sup>5</sup> The second is to introduce an explanation of some of the findings derived from this overview, especially the puzzle of why Islam has been so over-represented in religious civil wars from 1940 to 2000. My explanation relies on a theory of what I call “religious outbidding.”

In brief, I show that religion has played an increasing role in civil wars more generally, and that among the world’s religions, Islam has come to play a disproportionate role: more than 80 percent of religious civil wars involve Islam. I argue that to understand the role of religion in civil wars—and of Islam in particular—we need to understand how elites attract and maintain support and legitimacy. I make the case that due to particularities—both historically and within the religious writings themselves—appeals to Islam have both domestic and international traction. Whereas the largely Christian West has rejected the idea that violence in the name of religion has a positive utility and that the church and the state should be the same, Islam and its adherents have not rejected such notions. This, I argue, accounts not only for why Islam resonates within the borders of states but also for why it has transnational appeal, and consequently why it is relatively more involved in civil wars.

This article has four main sections. I begin by introducing key concepts and I then highlight important empirical facts about civil wars from 1940 to 2000. Next I lay out the logic of my

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4. See, for example, Jonathan Fox, *Religion, Civilization, and Civil War: 1945 through the New Millennium* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington, 2004); Bruce M. Russett, John R. O’Neal, and Michaelene Cox, “Clash of Civilizations, or Realism and Liberalism Déjà vu? Some Evidence,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 37, No. 5 (September 2000), pp. 583–608 and Ted Robert Gurr, “People Against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System: 1994 Presidential Address,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (September 1994), pp. 347–377; and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

5. The post-1940 time period was selected for two reasons. First, it permits comparison of the maximum data (civil wars) possible. Second, it does so in the time period most relevant (closest) to our own; and in addition, allows inferences to be drawn without as much risk of perturbation from World War I and World War II (only one war held over from 1940). In sum, conclusions drawn from this data set have the highest potential to yield both statistically significant and general findings.

arguments about religious outbidding and Islam and introduce four hypotheses on the role of religion in civil wars and the role of Islam in religious civil wars. This section is followed by two empirical tests of the arguments: (1) a preliminary statistical analysis and (2) a plausibility probe traced through a case study of the ongoing civil war in Sudan (a case chosen because it contains variation on the degree of centralization of religion—in this case, Islam—in the conflict). I conclude by highlighting theoretical and policy implications, and suggest an agenda for future research.

### *Key Concept: Religion*

There are thousands of religions worldwide, each with practices and beliefs that distinguish it from other religions and from other systems of practices and beliefs, such as political and economic activity. Religion is therefore a lumpy and complex concept or variable.<sup>6</sup> Definitions of religion typically include some or all of the following elements: a belief in a supernatural being (or beings); prayers and communication with that being; transcendent realities that might include some form of heaven, paradise or hell; a distinction between the sacred and the profane and between ritual acts and sacred objects; a view that explains the world as a whole and a person's role in it; behavior and a prescribed moral conduct in line with that worldview; and a group of people bound to one another on the basis of these elements.<sup>7</sup>

In the West, when one thinks of religion and violence, one generally focuses on religions of “peoples of the book” (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), as well as on Buddhism and

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6. As philosopher of religion William Alston illustrates, defining religion is difficult and controversial. It is not my task to come up with a definitive example—just one that helps clarify the arguments advanced here. William P. Alston, “Religion,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7 (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 140–145.

7. This definition follows Alston's definition. *Ibid.*

Hinduism. It is what these religions may have in common that makes them of such interest to scholars of violence, as well as to policymakers grappling with ending or preventing religious civil wars. In particular, as practiced today these religions share two key aspects relevant to the likelihood that conflict between competing groups may escalate into violence. First, religion tends to be uncompromising: that is, even given some liberty in translation and interpretation over time, the texts of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Koran limit the conduct of followers in important ways.<sup>8</sup> Each of these three texts serves as a guide to conduct approved or mandated by a supreme being. Conduct departing from these guidelines puts a follower at risk of losing God's favor (the risks and penalties vary depending on the nature of the breach of conduct). The end result is that when followers believe they are being asked to violate the key tenets of their faith as laid down in holy scripture, they are less likely to do so even when it might result in what most would consider a better outcome, such as peace. Second, as a rule, religion encourages followers to discount their physical survival.<sup>9</sup> The logic is simple. The physical self is mortal, and hence temporary, but the religious self is potentially immortal and eternal. Therefore, if belief is strong enough, therefore, sacrificing the temporary and mortal to obtain the eternal and immortal may seem rational.<sup>10</sup> In the Christian and Muslim traditions, self-sacrifice in religiously-prescribed conduct is held to be rewarded by eternal, superphysical existence in a heaven or paradise.

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8. Logically, we should therefore expect theocracies to be much more authoritarian than nontheocracies, because when church and state are fused, opposition to state policy becomes tantamount to opposition to God. On the other hand, a recent study of the alleged relationship between Islam and "authoritarianism" found only one causal link between the antidemocratic character of Islamic states and Islam as a religion: the subordination of women. See M. Steven Fish, "Islam and Authoritarianism," *World Politics*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (October 2002), pp. 4–37. On religion, political values, and women see also Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *The Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

9. Again, readers should keep in mind that my discussion of religion, religious practice, and religious motivations is ideal-type, and not meant to stand as descriptive even of the practice or motivation of a majority of the followers of any particular religion.

10. Religion is not the only system of beliefs that can have this effect: nationalism also shares it. See especially Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 9–12.

Taken together, aspects of religion as they relate to violence chip away at bargaining and self-preservation, two key pillars of the state system established in the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648.<sup>11</sup> A rational person (or state) is expected to assess the tangible costs and benefits of action or inaction, and then maximize his or her utility by choosing the course of action that will result in the highest likelihood of benefit with the lowest risk or cost.<sup>12</sup> But religious zealots will often act differently, choosing instead to sacrifice tangible benefits for intangible ones, even to the point of sacrificing their own lives.<sup>13</sup> Thus a secular actor (or state) can be coerced or deterred by the threat of destruction; whereas a zealot (or theocracy) may be impossible to coerce or deter in the same way.<sup>14</sup>

Before introducing my explanation of how religion affects the likelihood, intensity, and geographical reach of contemporary civil wars, I offer a broader picture of civil wars more generally, and religious civil wars specifically, from 1940 to 2000.

### *An Empirical Assessment of Religion and Civil Wars, 1940–2000*

The data analyzed below were collected in a data set that includes all civil wars fought from 1940 to 2000. To be part of the data set, a civil war had to meet six criteria:

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11. See Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty*; and Philpott, “The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations,” *World Politics*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (October 2002), pp. 66–95.

12. On the history of the rational state more generally, see Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interest: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977).

13. Note that according to prominent neorealists such as Kenneth N. Waltz, the domestic preferences of sub-state actors disappear at the interstate system level. See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: MacMillan, 1979), pp. 76–78. Policymakers in the real world appear less sanguine, however, as the debate over Iranian nuclearization makes clear. See also John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

14. See Monica Duffy Toft, “Issue Indivisibility and Time Horizons as Rationalist Explanations for War,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (January–March, 2006), pp. 34–69.



- the focus of the war was control over which group would govern the political unit;
- there were at least two groups of organized combatants;
- the state was one of the combatants;
- there had to be at least 1000 battle deaths per year on average;
- the ratio of total deaths had to be at least 95 percent to 5 percent, meaning the stronger side had to have suffered at least 5 percent of the casualties; and
- the war had to occur within the boundaries of an internationally recognized state or entity at the start of the war.

The first criterion centers on the notion of sovereignty and governance. In a civil war, the main struggle is over who will govern, with each side rejecting the legitimacy of the other to take control of the government. The second indicates that each side has to be organized and armed for the war. This criterion therefore excludes spontaneous mob actions or riots, as, for example, in the Albanian pyramid scheme crisis in 1997. The third criterion holds that the state must be formally involved in the war, which allows for the exclusion of communal conflicts where there are two warring identity groups. The fourth tries to capture the intensity of civil war as opposed to other types of violence such as crime, riots, and smaller-scale insurgencies. This excludes such cases as the fight for Northern Ireland (although the costs of that long conflict have been tragic). The fifth captures the idea of a minimal capability of each side to conduct its military operations by inflicting casualties on the other side. This ratio criterion excludes massacres and genocides. The sixth criterion excludes wars between two sovereign states.<sup>15</sup> The total number of wars that

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15. These six criteria are an amalgamation of criteria used by other scholars to define civil wars. For example, Roy Licklider and Nicholas Sambanis use a death threshold of one thousand total, as opposed to a yearly average. Furthermore, this data set includes wars that involved colonial struggles. Other data sets are inconsistent on this score. Take, for example, the case of Russia and Chechnya, which is included in most data sets, while the war for Algerian independence is not. Licklider would probably argue that this war fails to meet part of his third criteria that “each side must have significant numbers of troops made up of local residents.” Licklider, “The Consequences of Negotiated Settlements in Civil Wars, 1945-1993,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (September 1995), p. 682. The problem here is not with the criterion itself, but in its application across potential cases. In the case of Chechnya most of the fighting on the side of the Russian government was done by federal troops sent down to Chechnya from Moscow. Local “Russians” did not fight in the war, rather, they fell victim to the violence or fled. In Algeria, by contrast, French settlers engaged Algerians during the war for Algerian independence. Algeria better meets Licklider’s criterion than does Chechnya, yet it is excluded from his data set. To be consistent, wars that are commonly thought of as colonial wars are included in this data set. There are a total of 10 such wars included here. Licklider, “Consequences of Negotiated Settlements in Civil Wars.” Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis,

qualified for inclusion in the data set is 133.<sup>16</sup> Of these, 119 ended at least five years prior to 2000 and 14 are ongoing.<sup>17</sup>

From 1940 to 2000 there were 42 religious civil wars. Religion was central in 25 of these and peripheral in 17. For religion to count as “central,” combatants had to be fighting over whether the state or a region of the state would be ruled according to a specific religious tradition, as in the cases of Afghanistan, Chad, and Sudan. In order for religion to count as “peripheral,” combatants had to identify with a specific religious tradition (e.g., former Yugoslavia involving Bosnian Muslims [Islam], Croats [Catholicism], and Serbs [Orthodox Christianity]) and group themselves accordingly, but the rule of a specific religious tradition could not be the object of contention.

## DISTRIBUTION OF CIVIL WARS ACROSS TIME

An examination of the occurrence of civil wars across the decades reveals an increase in the proportion of religious civil wars. From the 1940s to the 1950s, the figure rose from 19 to 29 percent. The 1960s witnessed a modest decline to 21 percent, but the figure grew in the 1970s to 36 percent and continued to climb in the 1980s to 39 percent and into the 1990s to 43 percent. Religious civil wars also make up a disproportionate number of ongoing wars after 2000. There were 14 ongoing wars as of 2000. Of these, 7 (or 50 percent) were religious.

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“International Peacebuilding: A Theoretical and Quantitative Analysis,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 94, No. 4 (December 2000), pp. 779–802; and James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (February 2003), pp. 75–90.

16. The data set is available from the author.

17. Five years is a standard period to delineate the final and stable end of a war, as it typically allows for at least one election cycle. Licklider, “Consequences of Negotiated Settlements in Civil Wars”; Barbara F. Walter, “The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement,” *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 335–364; and Caroline A. Hartzell, “Explaining the Stability of Negotiated Settlements to Intrastate Wars” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (February 1999), pp. 3–22.

## DISTRIBUTION OF CIVIL WARS ACROSS SPACE

Most religious civil wars have occurred in four regions of the world: Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. Latin America and North America have experienced no religiously based civil wars. Asia and the Pacific experienced 19 religious civil wars, or 45 percent of all religiously based civil wars, the Middle East 7 (17 percent), Europe 9 (21 percent), and Africa 7 (17 percent) from 1940 to 2000. More than half of Europe's civil wars (9 of 16 or 56 percent) had a religious component. Asia and the Pacific hosted a somewhat smaller proportion: 19 of its 45 civil wars (48 percent) were religious. The Middle East follows with 7 of 19 (37 percent), and Africa with 7 of 43 (16 percent). These figures are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Global Distribution of Religious Civil Wars, 1940–2000

Region	Number of Civil Wars	Number of Religious Civil Wars	Percentage of All Religious Wars	Percentage of Wars in Region with a Religious Component
Africa	43	7	17	16
Asia and the Pacific	40	19	45	48
Europe	16	9	21	56
Latin America/Caribbean	15	0	0	0
Middle East	19	7	17	37
Total	133	42	100.0	NA

Table 1 shows that from 1940 to 2000 that Asia and the Pacific experienced a disproportionate number of religious civil wars, and that Europe experienced proportionately more religious civil wars than did other regions. This finding, however, does not reveal whether religion was a central or peripheral issue in these wars.

Table 2 provides data on the global distribution of wars with religion as a central or peripheral element. The third column of Table 2 shows that the vast proportion of wars with religion as a central issue took place in Asia and the Pacific (74 percent), the Middle East (72 percent), or Africa (71 percent). Only one of Europe's religious wars featured religion in a central role. So,

although most of Europe's wars involved religion, religion featured only peripherally. This is what we might expect to find if my argument that the wrenching experience of the Thirty Years' War accounts for the absence of religion as a core issue of conflict in Europe since the establishment of the states system.

Table 2. Global Distribution of Civil Wars with Religion as a Central or Peripheral Factor, 1940–2000

Region	Number of Wars with Religion Central	Number of Wars with Religion Peripheral	Percentage of All Religious Civil Wars with Religion Central	Percentage of Religious Civil Wars in Region with Religion Central
Africa	5	2	20	71
Asia and the Pacific	14	5	56	74
Europe	1	8	4	11
Latin America/Caribbean	0	0	0	0
Middle East	5	2	20	72
Total	25	17	100	NA

Although there were a total of 42 religious civil wars from 1940–2000, only 24 states were responsible for them. Table 3 provides the distribution of wars across states:

Table 3. Distribution of Religious Civil Wars across States, 1940–2000

State	Number of Civil Wars with Religion Central	Number of Civil Wars with Religion Peripheral
Afghanistan	1	0
Algeria	1	0
Azerbaijan	0	1
Bangladesh	0	1
Burma	2	0
Chad	0	1
China	2	0
Cyprus	0	2
Ethiopia	0	1
Georgia	0	1
India	5	1
Indonesia	1	2
Iran	2	0
Iraq	1	0
Israel	1	0
Lebanon	0	2
Nigeria	2	0
Philippines	2	0

Russia	1	1
Sri Lanka	0	1
Sudan	2	0
Syria	1	0
Tajikistan	1	0
Yugoslavia	0	3
Total	25	17

Three states experienced 3 or more wars. India experienced 6—5 of which involved religion as a central feature—followed by Indonesia and Yugoslavia with 3 each. An additional eight states experienced 2 of the 42 religious civil wars, and the remaining 13 wars occurred within other states.

#### *Particular Religions in Civil Wars: A Comparative Perspective*

The next series of data present findings about the role of particular religions in civil wars, and a striking finding emerges. One or both parties adhered to Islam in 81 percent of all religious civil wars (32 of 42 cases);<sup>18</sup> Christianity was involved in 21 (50 percent); Hinduism was involved in 6 cases (14 percent); and other religions were involved in only a handful.

Another way to examine the connection between individual religions and civil war is to look at the religious makeup of the states involved.

Table 4. Dominant Religion of States Experiencing Civil War

State	Dominant religion	Percentage of Population
Afghanistan	Islam/Sunni	84
Algeria	Islam/Sunni	99
Azerbaijan	Islam/Shiite/maj	>50
Bangladesh	Islam/Sunni	88
Burma	Buddhist	89
Chad	Islam/Sunni	50
China	Taoist	95
Cyprus	Christian/Greek Orthodox	78
Ethiopia	Islam/Sunni	50
Georgia	Christ/Georgian Orthodox	65

18. For a similar finding about ethnic conflicts in the early 1990s see Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, p. 269.

India	Hindu	80
Indonesia	Islam	88
Iran	Islam/Shiite	89
Iraq	Islam/Shiite	60
Israel	Judaism	80
Lebanon	Islam	70
Nigeria	Islam	50
Philippines	Christian/Catholic	83
Russia	Christian/Russian Orthodox	85
Sri Lanka	Buddhist	70
Sudan	Islam/Sunni	70
Syria	Islam/Sunni	74
Tajikistan	Islam/Sunni	80
Yugoslavia	Christian/Eastern Orthodox	49

Table 4 reveals that 58 percent of the states (14 of 24) that have experienced civil war have Islam as a dominant religion (where dominance is defined in terms of a majority of the population with a given religious identity). Christianity is a dominant religion in 21 percent of these states, while Buddhist, Hindu, and Taoist states make up the remainder. As highlighted in Table 5, most states (23 of 24) had at least a majority of the population that adhered to the dominant religion.

Another way to address the question of Islam and violence as compared to other religions is to consider religious influence among states and their populations. Of 191 states worldwide, 27 (14 percent) have a clear orientation toward Islam,<sup>19</sup> while 25 (13 percent) have regimes in which Islam is defined as the state religion.<sup>20</sup> Population data reveal that in 48 countries (about 25 percent of all states), at least 50 percent of the population adheres to Islam, while globally the number of adherents to Islam in mid-2003 was approximately 20 percent of the worldwide population.

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19. Assaf Moghadam, "A Global Resurgence of Religion?" Working Paper 03-03 (Cambridge, Mass.: Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, August 2003), pp. 46–54. Orientation is defined as states in which a given religion is accorded preferential treatment in terms of a disproportionate allocation of funds by a state to religious institutions or to religious groups when compared with state allocation to other religions and groups.

20. Ibid., p. 53.

In contrast, 32 states (17 percent) have a clear Christian orientation, and 13 (7 percent) have declared Christianity as the official state religion. Population figures show that in 103 countries (54 percent of states worldwide), Christianity is a majority religion, and in mid-2003, Christians represented 33 percent of the worldwide population.<sup>21</sup>

Orientation of states, therefore, does not offer much help in explaining why Islam is so likely to be involved in religious civil wars, because a nearly equal number of states have an Islamic or Christian orientation (14 and 17 percent respectively). With regard to regimes that define themselves religiously, nearly twice as many are Islamic—13 percent, compared with 7 percent that are Christian. But this statistic does not offer much help either. Despite the differences, there remain relatively few Islamic, and Christian-oriented cases. (On the other hand, if a declared state religion causes minorities to be insecure, the fact that there are twice as many states that define themselves as Islamic may account for increased violence, and if religious belief and practice are expected to correlate with the frequency of civil wars, Islam should be less represented than it is, because 33 percent of the world's population identifies with Christianity, while 20 percent identifies with Islam). These comparative statistics thus only intensify the original empirical puzzle this paper seeks to explain: why is it that Islam is overrepresented in civil wars from 1940 to 2000?

#### INTRAFaITH VERSUS INTERFaITH RELIGIOUS CIVIL WARS

Is there a difference in how often a given religion is involved in a civil war in which a religious schism (intrafaith) or a different religion (interfaith) is a central issue of conflict? An examination of the relationship of religion to violence across civil wars reveals that Islam is most

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21. Ibid., pp. 46–53.

involved in intrareligious wars, while the distribution of interfaith civil wars is dominated by both Muslims and Christians. Table 5 provides the data.

Table 5. Intrareligious and Interreligious Civil Wars, 1940–2000

Type of war	Number of Cases
Intrafaith	10
Islam	9
Christianity	1
Interfaith state-opposition	32
Christianity-Islam	13
Islam-Christianity	6
Hinduism-Islam	4
Hinduism-Christianity	2
Hinduism-Sikhism	1
Taoism-Buddhism	2
Islam-Buddhism	1
Buddhism-Christianity	1
Buddhism-Hinduism	1
Judaism-Islam	1
Total	42

There were 10 intrafaith civil wars from 1940 to 2000. Islam was involved in 9 of these (a striking 90 percent). Of these 10 cases, 6 involved religious fundamentalists who sought to overthrow a secular state (Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran in two cases, Syria, and Tajikistan). The remainder involved movements for self-determination (e.g., the Achinese of Indonesia, Catholic Croats fighting Orthodox Serbs in former Yugoslavia, and the Kurds of Iraq) or communal violence (e.g., the Maitatsine of Nigeria).

Interreligious wars made up the remaining 32 cases (76 percent).<sup>22</sup> Of the interfaith civil wars, Islam was again well represented, but so was Christianity. Islam was involved in 25 wars (78 percent), and Christianity was involved in 22 (69 percent). Moreover, of the religious

22. This finding contradicts Fox, who discovers that the majority of ethnoreligious conflicts he studied occurred within religions. The reason might be because he examined both low-level conflict and rebellion using the “Minorities at Risk” dataset, and this analysis examines only full-scale civil war. See Fox, *Religion, Civilization and Civil War*, pp. 59–67.



pairings in a war, Islam and Christianity were engaged most often. Significantly, however, twice as many wars emerged when Christianity was the dominant state religion. War broke out in 13 cases where Christianity dominated, in 7 where Islam was dominant, and 6 where Hinduism was dominant. The remaining interreligious wars involved Buddhism (6 cases), Taoism (2 cases), and Judaism (1 case). Table 6 provides the breakdown of religions and civil wars.

Table 6. Interreligious Civil Wars, 1940–2000

Interfaith state-opposition	Name of War <sup>23</sup>
Christianity-Islam	Chad Cyprus Ia, Ib Ethiopia III Georgia II Lebanon Ia, Ib Philippines IIIa, IIIb Russia Ia, Ib Yugoslavia II, III
Islam-Christianity	Azerbaijan Indonesia II, VI Nigeria I Sudan Ia, Ib
Hinduism-Islam	India Ia, Ib, Ic, II
Hinduism-Christianity	India III
Hinduism-Sikhism	India IV
Taoism-Buddhism	China IIa, IIb
Islam-Buddhism	Bangladesh
Buddhism-Christianity	Burma II IV
Buddhism-Hinduism	Sri Lanka II
Judaism-Islam	Israel

Although nearly two-thirds of all religious civil wars engaged people of different faiths, there has not been a precipitous increase in the number of these wars over the decades from 1940 to 2000. About one-fourth of all civil wars started since 1940 have been interreligious (32 of 133), and this has been a relatively consistent proportion across the decades. Thus, contrary to

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23. The roman numerals indicate number of civil wars that occurred in a state from 1940 to 2000, while the letters indicate the continuation of the same wars. So, for example, India witnessed four distinct civil wars, but the first one (Ia) recurred twice (Ib and Ic).

Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis, there has not been an increase in the rise of interreligious, or "civilizational" wars.<sup>24</sup> The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Interreligious Civil Wars, 1940–2000

Decade	Number of Civil Wars Started	Percentage of All Civil Wars Started in Decade
1940	4	19
1950	6	25
1960	5	22
1970	6	24
1980	5	28
1990	5	24

## THE DEADLINESS OF RELIGIOUS CIVIL WARS

One reason for the increased interest in religious civil wars might be that they are more deadly than nonreligious civil wars. Empirically, are religious civil wars costlier than other kinds of civil war, and does it matter whether religion features centrally or peripherally?

In terms of the intensity of religious civil wars, four aspects are worth reporting here: war duration, war termination type, recurrence, and noncombatants deaths. Religious civil wars tend to last longer than nonreligious civil wars, though this statistic is not statistically significant. Whereas nonreligious civil wars last on average 76 months, religious civil wars last 103 months, or about two years longer.<sup>25</sup> The same holds true if one compares central religious civil wars with all other civil wars: central religious civil wars last on average 91 months; all others last about 76 months. Surprisingly, these data reveal that cases in which religion is peripheral are the

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24. For tests of the Huntington's thesis and similar findings, see Fox, *Religion, Civilization, and Civil War*, chap. 6; and Russett, O'Neal and Cox, "Clash of Civilizations, or Realism and Liberalism Déjà vu?" For a study that supports the clash thesis see Philip Roeder, "Clash of Civilizations and Escalation of Domestic Ethnopolitical Conflicts," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 5 (2003), pp. 509–540.

25. The overall mean is 84 months.

longest, lasting on average 119 months. These findings, however, are not statistically significant and do not take into account other reasons for the peripheral wars.

With regard to the settlement of religious civil wars, wars in which religion is central do seem to be more intractable than nonreligious civil wars. Wars in which religion is central are less likely to be resolved by a negotiated settlement. In contrast, civil wars in which religion is peripheral are more than twice as likely to be resolved in this manner.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, a central religious civil war is nearly twice as likely as nonreligious civil wars to recur: 6 of 25 (24 percent) of these religious wars recurred, compared with nonreligious wars.<sup>27</sup> Peripheral religious civil wars do not seem to be any more likely to recur than nonreligious civil wars.

In addition, civil wars in which religion is central are four times deadlier to noncombatants than civil wars in which religion is peripheral (28,000 vs. 7,000 average deaths per year for central and peripheral religious involvement respectively).<sup>28</sup> To the extent we care about noncombatant mortality, this finding makes it clear that the movement of religion from a peripheral to a central issue in a civil war can be expected to have dire consequences.

## SUMMARY

Three important facts about religion and civil wars emerge from the analysis above. First, religious civil wars make up more than one-third of all civil wars fought from 1940 to 2000, and there is little sign that this trend will wane any time soon. Second, among the world's major

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26. Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 2.23$ ,  $Pr = 0.14$ . Note that this is not quite significant.

27. Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 1.94$ ,  $Pr = 0.16$ . The findings were similar: all religious civil wars, both peripheral and central, were tabulated with all nonreligious civil wars. Religious civil wars are about two times more likely to recur (Pearson  $\chi^2(1) = 1.96$ ,  $Pr = 0.16$ ).

28. To calculate whether religious civil wars are more brutal toward civilians, I subtracted the average number of battlefield deaths per year for each war from the total deaths per year, thereby obtaining an average nonbattlefield annual death count. Note that nonreligious civil wars seem to brutalize civilians even more so than central religious wars, accounting for 42,000 non-battle deaths per year on average.

religions, Islam was involved in just over 80 percent of these civil wars. Third, religious civil wars in some instances are more costly than nonreligious civil wars: they last longer, and when religion is central, they are more intractable and are deadlier to noncombatants than wars in which religion is peripheral.

In the next section, I offer an explanation for these findings in the form of a general theory I call “religious outbidding.”

### *The Role of Religion in Civil Wars since 1940*

Within states, certain religious groups may fight for a more prominent role for religion in state policies against other religious groups or proponents of a secular system of governance. It is when competing visions of the role of religion within a state emerge that religion moves from a peripheral to a central issue. A key question therefore is: Under what conditions does religion move from a peripheral to a central issue in civil wars?

I argue that religion is likely to become central to a civil war when political elites compete in evoking religious doctrine and beliefs in an effort to maintain or attract domestic and international support. My argument builds on Jack Snyder’s model of nationalist outbidding.<sup>29</sup> Snyder argues that nationalist political elites will attempt to outbid each other to enhance their nationalist credentials with a key domestic political audience (domestic political audiences being most important in democratic states, whereby some mechanism—however discounted—the public has a say in determining a state’s domestic and foreign policies).

In my theory of religious outbidding, bids are not restricted to issues of nationalism or hypernationalism, nor are they unique to democracies. Religious outbidding applies to

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29. Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

contending combatants in civil wars, particularly those located in the developing world. Civil wars are likely to become religious civil wars when four conditions hold: (1) the rule of a state's leaders is threatened; (2) the society has preexisting religious cleavages; (3) the state monopolizes information and communications; and (4) key resources needed for continued rule—small arms, cash, skilled fighters, and logistical support—lie beyond the geographic boundaries of the conflict itself, thus making transnational appeals more necessary and more attractive.

The fourth condition is particularly important because unlike nationalism, which by its nature tends to be a local issue, religion—that is, Christianity before the Thirty Years' War and Islam since its inception—tends to be transnational; in other words, appeals to religion may carry the benefit of attracting support in the form of religious obligation from outside the physical area of the conflict. This is true of some religions more than others, and of some religions at certain historical periods more than other periods.

These conditions help to narrow down the key determinants of religious outbidding, which focus attention on survival and victory resources: (1) where are the key resources necessary to secure tenure located (internally or externally) and (2) what is the best type of bid to make to obtain those key resources (e.g., ideological, ethnic, national, or religious)? Variation in (1) will help determine variation in (2); but the outbidding process is similar in all cases.

Still, the puzzle of why some religions are involved in religious civil wars more than others, or at least since 1940, remains unanswered. In the next section, I argue that the transnational aspect of outbidding may help explain why Islam has played a larger role in religious civil wars than either Christianity or Judaism.

## RELIGION, SECULARIZATION, AND CIVIL WAR

My explanation for why Islam is involved in such a high percentage of religious civil wars is based on the timing of the advent of the “state,” and the subsequent development of an industrial system that made industrialized states so deadly.<sup>30</sup> In short, I argue that Islam is disproportionately engaged for three reasons. First, unlike Christian Europe, Islam has never experienced a religious war on the scale of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648), and as a result, never gained an incentive to separate faith from government. Second, Islam’s holy sites are located in a region of the world which possesses the largest and most easily accessible petroleum reserves. Third, and related, Islam maintains a religiously sanctioned call to arms in defense of the faith – one of two forms of Jihad – that has no analog among contemporary religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and to some extent, Hinduism.

We should recall that the notion that political communities are best organized into something called a “state” is by no means universal across time and space. It is neither “natural” nor inevitable that people should choose to live in states. On the contrary, the “state system,” as we know it, had its birth in Europe following thirty years of religious war. The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 marked the end of the era of the unfettered prince as sovereign and ushered in an increasingly secularized system of leadership. The Treaty marked a shift—by no means either immediately decisive or universal—from a world in which princes acted as agents of religious authority (or on an equal basis with regard to temporal authority), to one in which they increasingly came to view religious authority as a resource (in terms of legitimacy, tangible assets, or both). Prior to the war, princes had come to rely less on specific religious approval for

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30. Industrialization is the most common explanation for the success of the West in overcoming resistance beyond the boundaries of Europe, but plague and culture have also been implicated. See, for example, Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997); and Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power* (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

their actions and instead increasingly relied on the concept of divine right as a source of legitimacy. But the horrors of the Thirty Years' War and the philosophical reaction to it—for example, the popularity of the theme of “reason over faith” during the Enlightenment—persuaded most survivors that the model of a government by a nonsecular prince should be abandoned in favor of a secular form of government. Worship would become an increasingly private matter and increasingly distinct from the practice of ruling.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, the nature of warfare itself underwent significant change during the period. In the early years of the war, much of its destructiveness was wrought by the necessity of quartering one's troops in areas containing accessible food supplies. The process of foraging, and counter foraging—as armies fought over the same territories season after season—soon left much of the European heartland incapable of supporting military operations (and, more horribly, noncombatants). Princes turned increasingly to mercenaries to supplement their military power, and this in turn led to a dramatic increase in demand for cash to pay them. Princes found that in order to survive, much less conquer their adversaries, they had to bargain with subordinates in order to gain the cash necessary to continue the fight; and merchantmen and bankers were thus in a position to advance their own agendas in exchange for funding the prince. Thus, by the end of the three-decade long conflict, the twin processes of mutual exhaustion and cross-class bargaining combined to make the previous century's ideal of a religiously-sanctioned, all-powerful prince all but extinct (it survived only in Russia).

As a result, emerging European states slowly abandoned the model of a state ruled by God, save perhaps for the vestigial “state” of Vatican City in Rome. But Islam—riven by small scale

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31. Europe and its cultural descendents had another great struggle to endure: the struggle over the proper system of government for the state. It was not enough to separate the cleric from the prince. If clerics were uncompromising, princes were capricious. This led to the struggle to overcome the institution of aristocracy, or the rule of blood over merit, which ended with the triumph of the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century. On this theme more generally, see Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

internecine strife—never had an equivalent experience. Indeed Caleb Carr, for example, goes so far as to argue that Islam—once briefly at the forefronts of science, literature, and art—was pushed into decline due in large measure to its collective inability to overcome the temptation of its warring factions to indulge in barbarism (i.e., the systematic and deliberate targeting of noncombatants in war).<sup>32</sup> Islam, of course, has had one major modern internecine conflict: the war between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s. But horrific as this war was, it never approached the scale or intensity of the wholesale butchery experienced in Europe from 1618–1648. Like Christianity, Islam is a religion supported and constrained by holy texts. But unlike Christianity, Islam has not gained an incentive to interpret its texts in ways that permit or encourage the separation of religion and state.<sup>33</sup> On the contrary, religion and state are fused, and rather than address schisms between, for example, Sunnis and Shiites, most contemporary interpretations of the Koran focus on the conduct of Muslims vis-à-vis Jews and Christians.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, and partly as a result of these historical processes, the West industrialized first. In its interstate depredations, and, later, its export of the concept of nationalism as a high form of legitimacy, the West became an inadvertent force for unifying Islam. The colonial and postcolonial periods—marked as they were by the paradoxical mix of good intentions on the one hand, and lies and naked exploitation on the other hand—helped recreate the concept of Arab

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32. Caleb Carr refers to this as “destructive” warfare. See Carr, *The Lessons of Terror: A History of Warfare Against Civilians: Why it Has Always Failed and Why it Will Fail Again* (New York: Random House, 2001), pp. 40, 45, 77.

33. The literature on the connection between Islam and the state is vast. For a terrific overview of the tension between Islam, the state, and individual liberty see Khaled Abou El Fadl, “Islam and the Challenge of Democracy,” *Boston Review* (April/May 2003). See also Bernard Lewis, “Islam and Liberal Democracy: A Historical Overview,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (April 1996); and John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). For an empirical evaluation that finds that Islamic countries are “democratically” challenged see Fish, “Islam and Authoritarianism.”

34. This argument is supported by the data below: there is almost no difference between the number of states with Islamic orientation and those whose official religion is Islam (27 and 25 respectively). For Christian states the proportions are much different: 32 states have a distinctly Christian orientation, yet only 13 claim Christianity as a state religion. Moreover, there are more Christians worldwide than Muslims and more states whose populations contain a majority of Christians, yet Christianity is much less well represented in religious civil wars than Islam.



(and Islamic) unity.<sup>35</sup> In addition, both Arab nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism received a strong boost from the success of Jews in establishing—with Western help—a Jewish state in territory predominantly populated by Arabs and Muslims. The attempted Arab destruction of Israel in 1948, combined with the rising importance of petroleum to industrialized economies and militaries, was bound to make the Middle East the focal point of many contests. Even more importantly, Islam's holiest site – a physical location – is Mecca, which sits on the Arabian peninsula; the same peninsula so well endowed with petroleum resources. It follows that because petroleum became so vital, and because the antipathies between Jews, Arabs, and Iranians (Persians) only grew after World War II, conflict would be more likely in this geographic region and that as a result, Islam would play a disproportionate role.

So there are strong historical and geographical reasons to explain Islam's disproportionately high role in religious civil wars from 1940 to 2000. But history and geography, though necessary, are not sufficient to explain Islam's increased participation. For that we will need to include the process of religious outbidding. The increased threat experienced by the leaders in Islamic states underlines the fact that religious credibility is a valuable—indispensable—commodity; both for maintaining domestic power and legitimacy and for attracting foreign support should that be useful or necessary. Arab leaders from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, for instance, often attempt to outdo one another in their dedication to Arabs as an ethnic group, Islam as a faith, and (at least until Egypt's stunning defection in 1979) the annihilation of Israel as a goal of state. Leaders who neglect religion—for example, the shah of Iran in the

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35. A concept which predates the advent of the European states system and which has endured ever since. For early manifestations of nationalism against first the Ottomans and then the British see George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (Simon Publications, 2001); and T.E. Lawrence, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*. A more scholarly account can be found in Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih, Reeva S. Simon, eds., *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). See also Ernest Gellner, ed., *Islamic Dilemmas: Reformers, Nationalists, and Industrialization* (New York: Mouton, 1985); Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

1970s—may be ousted from power, or, in the case of Anwar Sadat, lose their lives when seeking to suppress it.

We should also consider that there may also be something specific within the text of the Koran or the sayings attributed to the prophet (*hadith*) that makes Islam more violence prone than other religions. But as an explanation for Islam's disproportionate participation in civil wars, this one is weak. Christianity, to cite but one example, was a particularly violence-prone religion prior to the Thirty Years' War.<sup>36</sup> That, combined with the fact that the meanings of the texts are subject to interpretation, should make one skeptical of concluding that something intrinsic to Islamic texts promotes violence—even if one knew nothing of the content of the texts themselves.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, the literature on Islam and terrorism has perhaps belabored the link between violent conflict and faith as embodied in the concept of Jihad or holy struggle. A bid for increased religious legitimacy in this context implies increased access to arms, cash, and fighters who will, as part of a religious obligation, travel to the site of a conflict and support whichever leader has most successfully established his religious credentials. One could hardly, by contrast, expect a similar appeal in a Christian religious context, because the Thirty Years' War interceded between

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36. This is not a teleological argument. Christianity again could become the basis of internecine fighting, but at this point of historical development, especially in Europe, this seems unlikely. On the subject of religious resurgence, see Timothy Samuel Shaw and Monica Duffy Toft, "Why God is Winning," *Foreign Policy*, Issue 155 (July/August, 2006), pp. 38–43.

37. Carr's thesis is illuminating in this regard. He argues that Islam, in its key texts, contains contradictions regarding the legitimacy of deliberately harming noncombatants and unbelievers; and that these contradictions are best explained by the historical context of the times in which these books were originally written. Islam, in Carr's reckoning, was born into a time of extreme violence against noncombatants and this explains its contradictions regarding mercy and ruthlessness. But Carr acknowledges that this is something *shared* by Christianity (and, one might add, though Carr does not, Judaism). Thus if Christian, Islamic, and Jewish texts all contain exhortations to ruthlessness, it is relatively difficult to explain variation in war proneness of each religion based on a close comparison of texts. Something else must be going on. See Carr, *Lessons of Terror*, p. 37.

the Crusades (when Christians were able to increase their chances of going to heaven or at least expiate guilt for past sins by participating in an overtly religious struggle) and the present.<sup>38</sup>

## RELIGIOUS CIVIL WAR AND INTERNATIONAL ORDER

My argument for why Islam is disproportionately represented in post–World War II civil wars highlights a key aspect of religious civil wars more generally: religion stands as a potential threat to international order, as embodied by the states system, just as much today as it did in the seventeenth century. The logic is straightforward. When religion interferes with bargaining, combatants in a war may go on killing each other long after there is any political, economic, or social utility in doing so.<sup>39</sup> When religious belief is used to justify violence, in other words, wars may (a) last longer, (b) be harder to stop, and (c) be more destructive than wars in which the central issue does not involve religious practice or identity. The logic of this argument is that because the intangible benefits of religiously approved conduct outweigh the tangible costs of bargaining, combatants may refuse to bargain and continue to fight, especially because religious tradition such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, a conflict outcome is often considered a manifestation of God’s will (a judgment), and violent conflict itself is therefore transmuted into a test of religious faith.<sup>40</sup>

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38. On the contrary, the most useful type of argument a beleaguered combatant—be it an incumbent government or rebel group—can use to seek support from the West today is that it is an “ally in the war against [Islamic fundamentalist] terror.”

39. This pattern in fact accurately characterizes the dynamics of conflict bargaining in the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1989). After its first series of offensives failed and it became clear that Iran could not easily be beaten in a conventional conflict, Iraq offered Iran peace terms. Iraq acted as a secular European state might have done in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Once the tangible costs exceeded the expected benefits, Iraq was ready to quit. Iran, however, acted irrationally by those same standards: even though continuing to fight was unlikely to result in victory (or victory at an acceptable cost), Iran refused to accept Iraq’s increasingly favorable peace terms. As a result, a war which should have been over in two years lasted nearly a decade. For a concise history of the Iran-Iraq war, see Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War, 1980–1988* (Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2002).

40. Moreover, especially in the Jewish and Muslim contexts, God’s punishments can be expected to be *collective* as well as individual. That is, Jewish civilization or Muslim civilization can be harmed by deviations from proper conduct even by a minority of the community’s misconduct. For a clear statement of this in Islam, see Marc

When religion disrupts deterrence, antagonists in a civil dispute may escalate their dispute to include violence and may refuse to respect intrafaith limits on their conduct. For example, limitations on attacking noncombatants or refusing quarter may be abandoned when the adversary is a nonbeliever. Thus religious belief may turn civil disputes into (a) civil wars and (b) particularly brutal civil wars. The logic of this argument is that if antagonists have no fear of death, they cannot be deterred from taking risks or actions (e.g. organized violence) that increase their chances of being killed. Also, when government and religion are mixed, criticism of or resistance to the government becomes tantamount to criticism of or resistance to God: an intolerable religious crime. Moreover, if only believers are fully “human” in the eyes of God, then the moral consequences of killing unbelievers is of no greater consequence than cutting down a tree; it is not sinful and therefore not prohibited.<sup>41</sup>

Such are the arguments that underpin the view that religion is a threat to peace, in the form of either in civil war or in wars between states. Inheritors of the legacy of the Thirty Years’ War view states or other actors who hold religious motivations for violence as fundamentally irrational. As observed above, however, religious actors are actually rational, but they base their utility calculations on intangible values.<sup>42</sup>

## HYPOTHESES ON RELIGION AND CIVIL WAR

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Sageman, “Statement of Marc Sageman to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States,” Homeland Security, July 9, 2003, <http://www.globalsecurity.org>.

41. In some circumstances, we can readily imagine a situation in which killing is not only not a crime, but killing itself becomes a religious obligation; the satisfaction of which can result in rewards to the killer (e.g. salvation, sainthood, etc.).

42. Toft, “Issue Indivisibility and Time Horizons.”

The logic of the preceding arguments—on religious outbidding, bargaining intransigence, and conflict escalation—can be reduced to four hypotheses on the links between the centrality of religion and the quality and outcomes of civil wars:

H1. Religion and conflict involvement: religious bids have higher utility in Islamic than non-Islamic states.

H2. Centrality of religion in violent conflict: the more religious outbidding one observes, the more likely it is that religion will move from a peripheral to a central issue in a conflict.

H3. Consequences of religious conflict: (a) the more central religion is to a violent conflict, the less likely it is to be resolved by negotiations short of war, and (b) the more central religion is to a conflict, the less likely combatants are to restrain from using force against nonbelievers.

Hypothesis 1 is about comparative religious outbidding. Assuming key factions or government leaders are under threat, they can be expected to make bids calculated to improve their chances of survival.<sup>43</sup> The nature of those bids—ideological, nationalist, religious—should depend on the nature of the threat and each leader’s assessment of the appeal most likely to gain the needed resources. Logically, religious bids have the potential both to enhance local support (e.g., from army officers, key union leaders or other interest groups, and the population more generally) and to attract foreign support from fellow adherents.<sup>44</sup> For a combination of historical reasons as well as factors particular to different religions, these appeals are most likely to maximize a leader’s survival when they can simultaneously enhance internal and external support,<sup>45</sup> but all religions are not equal in this regard. Thus, one of the most common

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43. Note that this assumption is not intended to be descriptive so much as ideal-type. Clearly, some elites under threat will advance religious bids less for instrumental reasons and more because a profession of faith is precisely what is called for when one is threatened. On balance, however, we may expect a cause and effect relationship to stand as a reasonable assumption: actors respond to threats by advancing a religious (or other) bid *in order to defend themselves or advance their rule*, and such conduct is therefore instrumental in the way assumed here.

44. Note that under more limited circumstances, *nationalist* bids might also accomplish this, so long as the external support is coming from a state either controlled by, or host to, a large number of fellow nationals. The various “pan” movements spring to mind in this regard, and we have good historical examples, such as Serb appeals to the Tsar in 1914 on the basis of a shared Slav (and somewhat less salient, Orthodox) identity.

45. National appeals are a problem in this regard, because nationalist leaders must be wary of seeking outside *nonnational* support. This in large part explains the dilemma of the government of South Vietnam after 1954: South

denominations of religious bids one should expect to encounter is a bid for Islamic religious legitimacy, because Islam has a specific (and today very active) obligation-to-defend-by-force component. Note that in some situations—most recently for Shiites in southern Iraq, for example—a religious bid will be the best option available: Iran is predominately Shiite, but it is also predominately Persian, so local clerics seeking to gain access to Iranian resources to resist Saddam Hussein’s depredations following the Gulf war in the early 1990s made religious bids.

Hypothesis 2 focuses on when religion moves from a peripheral to a central issue in a conflict. This hypothesis is tricky, because as stated it is just as plausible that the arrow of causality could be reversed: once religion becomes central to a conflict (by means unspecified), elites are likely to compete to enhance their religious credentials and legitimacy. Empirically, this is exactly what happens, but only after an initial move of religion from periphery to center. In other words, Hypothesis 2 stands as stated—the original shift from the periphery to the center needs explanation—with the caveat that particularly close attention must be paid in comparative case study analysis to the possibility of reverse causality.

Hypothesis 3 has two variations, both of which focus on the consequences of religion moving from the periphery to the center. Hypothesis 3(a) deals with the issue of bargaining. Every conflict involves some error in anticipating costs and benefits of the escalation to violence. After the violence starts, however, the relative balance between costs and benefits becomes progressively clearer, and this clarity presents opportunities for bargaining to end the violence (though not necessarily the dispute).<sup>46</sup> Hypothesis 3(a) is therefore meant to stand as a test of the

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Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem and subsequent leaders (Diem and his family were assassinated in 1963) could not simultaneously enhance their domestic nationalist credentials *and* seek increasing support from the United States, because U.S. support (especially after the introduction of U.S. combat troops in 1965) made them appear as puppets of nonnationals. By contrast, Slobodan Milosevic could appeal to the Russian Federation for diplomatic support without harming his nationalist credentials because the Russian Federation, though not strictly “national,” counted as “Slavic” (and Orthodox, too).

46. Cf. Geoffrey Blainey, *Causes of War* (New York: Free Press, 1988).

general proposition that religion is less amenable to compromise than most other issues. If true, then one should expect (1) more conflicts of interest to escalate into violence; in civil wars (2) civil wars that apparently ended short of a decisive outcome to be more prone to reignite than civil wars fought over other issues.

Hypothesis 3(b) gets at a problem not restricted to religious belief but closely associated with it historically: the fate of noncombatants. When Spain encountered the New World in the fifteenth century, for example, the Catholic Church had to grapple with the problem of the status of indigenous (indigenous to America) peoples: Were they human, and thus entitled to due process and fair treatment? Or were they “savages” to be treated as a special kind of animal?<sup>47</sup> After some debate, the distinction turned on the process of conversion: those who converted to the “true” faith were to be considered humans (albeit conquered humans) and thus entitled to humane treatment. The unconverted could be treated as any other natural resource: killed, made slaves of, and so on (it was, for example, impossible to murder a “savage”). Thus in some religions, only those living within the faith gain the full consideration and respect of law.

## ANALYSIS

Hypotheses 3(a) and 3(b) have already been engaged by the statistical data presented in the first part of this paper: religious civil wars, for example, last longer than other civil wars and central religious civil wars are more deadly (particularly to noncombatants) on average than religious civil wars in which religion is a peripheral issue. This evidence supports Hypothesis 3(a) which holds that religious adherents in a civil war are less likely to negotiate by means other than violence. Hypothesis 3(b) also receives support because the logic of the argument suggest that outcomes short of annihilation of the “unbelievers” or “apostates” will be tactical (i.e., temporary

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47. See Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

lulls intended to provide time to acquire the resources necessary to achieve total victory) rather than permanent. Clearly, other sorts of conflict—especially those over national homeland territories—exhibit similar patterns.<sup>48</sup> So support for Hypothesis 3(b) on this account is equivocal at best. But had the data gone the other way, Hypothesis 3(b) would have been at least partially refuted. It was not.

Hypothesis 1 receives indirect support in the empirical presentation, because Islam was shown to be more likely than other religions to play a role in a religious civil war. This observation is qualified, however, by other explanations for Islam's overrepresentation (the existence of the state of Israel and large oil reserves in the Middle East).<sup>49</sup>

It remains to explore the above hypotheses in a synoptic case study of the ongoing civil war in Sudan. Sudan actually comprises two cases of civil war between the same combatants. In the first war, religion played a peripheral role, with one side—the South—adhering to Christian beliefs, and the other—the North—to Islam. The second war is a different story. As the government sought to impose an Islamic code throughout the country, religion came to play a central role.

### *Religion in Sudan's Civil Wars*

The civil war in Sudan was chosen because it contains a wealth of history and events to test arguments about the role of religion, including variation along the “centralization of religion”

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48. Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

49. Future work on this important finding should include comparisons that isolate the key features of Islam from other religions (e.g., under what circumstances do Hindu, or Christian, or Jewish elites under threat tender religious bids?), while also perhaps controlling for a state's level of development.



variable. I begin with a brief historical background, before moving on to explore each of the four hypotheses of religion and civil war.

## BACKGROUND

Save for eleven years between 1972 and 1983, Sudan has been ravaged by civil war since before the country gained independence on January 1, 1956. The war pits predominantly black African and non-Muslim Southerners against northern Sudanese states in which Islam is the predominant religion. Since 1983, this war and related causes (such as war-induced famine) have left more than 2 million dead and displaced nearly 4.5 million people.<sup>50</sup> In 2002, a task force report published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies described the situation as follows: “Adding to the outrage is the government’s aerial bombardment of humanitarian relief sites; the systematic denial and manipulation by Khartoum and opposition forces of relief to imperiled civilian populations; religious persecution; failure by the government to combat slavery and abductions of children and women into servitude by Arab tribal militias; and mounting allegations that the aggregate consequence of this pattern of violence is genocidal.” The task force concluded that the central problem on which “virtually everything hinges is the devastating war that has raged in Sudan since 1983,” and urged the next U.S. administration to exert great effort to end the conflict.<sup>51</sup>

Sudan (from the Arabic *bilad as-Sudan*, or “land of blacks”) is the largest country on the African continent. With an area of roughly 2.5 million square kilometers, it is slightly more than

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50. See, for example, U.S. Committee for Refugees, “Country Report: Sudan,” Worldwide Refugee Information, 2002. For statistics on Internally Displaced People (IDPs), see “Profile of Internal Displacement: Sudan,” Global IDP Database, Updated 31 March 2003, Global IDP Project, Norwegian Refugee Council, <http://www.idpproject.org>. Sudan has the largest concentration of internally displaced people in the world. Freedom House also cites a figure of 4.5 million displaced persons. See “Sudan Campaign,” Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/religion/sudan/index.htm>.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–3.

one-quarter the size of the United States.<sup>52</sup> In 2002, Sudan's population was estimated at approximately 37 million, 70 percent of whom were Sunni Muslims, 25 percent adherents of indigenous traditional religions, and 5 percent Christians.<sup>53</sup> Muslims dominate the northern part of the country, while Sudanese practicing Christianity and traditional religions tend to live in the south. Nearly 2 million Christian southern Sudanese live in and around the capital, Khartoum. As of early 2002, the ethnic division of Sudanese was 52 percent black and 39 percent Arab.<sup>54</sup> The total number of tribes in Sudan is estimated at 450, and some 132 languages are spoken across the country.<sup>55</sup>

According to Francis Deng, former Sudanese ambassador to the United States and a preeminent scholar of Sudan, the country's civil war "culminates a long history in which the North has tried to spread its religion and language to the South, which has resisted these efforts."<sup>56</sup> Christianity and Islam appeared in Sudan in the sixth and seventh centuries, respectively.<sup>57</sup> The arrival of Islam in North Africa led to a gradual decline of Christian influence, including in northern Sudan where, in 1504, an Arab-Muslim alliance overthrew the Christian kingdoms. With Islam established in the North, Islamic Arabs tried to assert control over the South.<sup>58</sup>

The Arab invasion from the North failed in the southern parts of today's Sudan—an area protected by swamps and tropical humidity—and was stymied by fierce resistance of southern Sudanese. Northern incursions into the South were neither deep nor permanent. Consequently,

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52. CIA World Factbook 2006, available online at <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/su.html>.

53. Ibid.

54. The Beja ethnic group formed 6 percent of the population, foreigners 1 percent, and other ethnic groups an additional 1 percent. Ibid.

55. Donald Petterson, *Inside Sudan: Political Islam, Conflict, and Catastrophe* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999), p. 5.

56. Francis M. Deng, "Sudan—Civil War and Genocide," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Winter 2001).

57. The role of religion in the civil war will be discussed in more detail below.

58. Deng, "Sudan—Civil War and Genocide."

the successful Arabization and Islamization that occurred in the North failed to take root in the South.<sup>59</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, Muhammad Ahmad bin Abdallah, a boat builder's son, proclaimed himself the Mahdi, the second prophet and restorer of the Islamic faith. The Mahdist regime lasted until 1898, when it was destroyed by British and Egyptian forces, which subsequently established the so-called condominium rule.<sup>60</sup> Islam survived.

During the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, the British replaced Arab officials in the South with black Africans and prevented northerners from entering the South.<sup>61</sup> Use of the English language was encouraged, and conversion to Christianity was vigorously pursued.<sup>62</sup> The British neglected the South's economic development and failed to create an effective administrative infrastructure.<sup>63</sup> In the North, by contrast, the British invested in creating an educated Arab and Muslim Sudanese elite, while advancing the region's economic and social development. At the same time, Egypt encouraged Islamic values and beliefs. As a result, condominium rule promoted cultural and religious separateness of the North and the South.

The British united the separately ruled zones in 1947, following increased signs of Sudanese nationalism in the North and awareness of the inevitability of Sudanese independence. In the Juba conference in the same year, southern chiefs cooperated with northern nationalists to pursue independence from colonial rule. As the British troops began to withdraw, however, Southerners

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59. Deng notes that the Arabs were interested in the material value of blacks as slaves and thus had no wish to integrate with them. He also notes that had the Arabs and Muslims successfully converted southern Black Africans to Islam, they could no longer have engaged in legal slave raids against them, given Islam's prohibition of enslaving fellow Muslims. Deng, "Sudan—Civil War and Genocide." Besides the slave trade, an additional incentive for Northerners to dominate the South was that it was from the South that the Nile flowed.

60. Petterson, *Inside Sudan*, pp. 6–8.

61. Milton Viorst, "Sudan's Islamic Experiment," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (May/June 1995).

62. Francis M. Deng, "Scramble for Souls: Religious Intervention Among the Dinka in Sudan," in Abdullahi an-Na'im, ed., *Proselytizing and Communal Self-Determination in Africa* (New York: Orbis, 1999).

63. D. Michelle Domke, "Civil War in the Sudan: Resources or Religion?" Inventory of Conflict and Environment (ICE) case study, American University, <http://www.american.edu/ted/ice/sudan.htm>.

perceived themselves to be disadvantaged by the fusion, as most administrative posts were filled by better educated Northerners. Southerners were at an additional disadvantage because few of them spoke Arabic, which had already become the official language of the North. In the South, “Sudanization” became tantamount to “Northernization.” According to Deng, for Southerners, “independence was to prove merely a change of outside masters, with the northerners taking over from the British and defining the nation in accordance with the symbols of their Arab-Islamic identity.”<sup>64</sup>

#### SUDAN’S FIRST CIVIL WAR, 1955–72

Already the divisions between North and South Sudan had taken on a multilayered complexity. Differences of geography, race, language, education, and economic development added to differences in religion to make conflict between the two regions all but overdetermined.

On August 18, 1955, several months before Sudan’s independence, violent conflict broke out when soldiers of the army’s southern Corps mutinied after hearing rumors that they were to be disarmed and taken northward. Led by Lt. Reynaldo Loyela, a group of southern soldiers at Torit refused to comply and attacked its officers. On the same day, another 190 southern soldiers mutinied in the districts of Juba, Yei, Yambio, and Maridi. The government at Khartoum declared a state of emergency, and on August 21, Royal Air Force transport aircraft airlifted some 8,000 Sudanese army troops into the south.<sup>65</sup> The civil war had begun.

In 1958, following a short period of democratic rule under Sudan’s first prime minister, Ismail al-Azhari, the fluctuation between civilian and military rule began. In November 1958 the

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64. Francis M. Deng, *War of Visions* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995), cited in International Crisis Group, “God, Oil, and Country,” *Africa Report*, No. 39 (January 2002), p. 8.

65. Edgar O’Ballance, *The Secret War in the Sudan: 1955–1972* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977), p. 41.

military, led by Gen. Ibrahim Abboud, assumed power, quickly suppressing the opposition and speeding up the Islamization of the South through aggressive proselytizing.<sup>66</sup>

Abboud's military campaign forced thousands of Southerners into exile in neighboring countries, where they soon formed opposition organizations. The remnants of the mutiny of 1955 formed the most violent among southern Sudanese opposition groups, the *Anya-Nya* ("snake poison"), which enjoyed widespread support in the South. General Abboud's full-scale military campaign against *Anya-Nya* and other Southern opposition movements<sup>67</sup> generated some 500,000 refugees.<sup>68</sup>

On May 25, 1969, a military junta headed by Jaafar Muhammad al-Nimeiri overthrew a caretaker government that had ruled since October 1964. Nimeiri strengthened the relationship between the Sudanese government and the Soviet Union, already the main financial and military backer of Khartoum. He also increased his country's support of and identification with Arab states vis-à-vis Israel.<sup>69</sup>

In July 1971, a failed communist coup led to the termination of Soviet support. Bereft of its strongest military supporter and leading a weakened army, Nimeiri made peace overtures to the Southern rebels. In March 1972, his government signed the Addis Ababa agreement. Its clauses contained power-sharing, security guarantees for Southerners, and granted the South political and economic autonomy.<sup>70</sup> The first civil war was over.

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66. ICG, "God, Oil, and Country," p. 9.

67. The largest opposition movement was the Sudan African National Union (SANU), which initially sought a peaceful solution to the southern Sudan problem. As the civil war intensified, the SANU itself took up arms. See Dunstan Wai, *The African-Arab Conflict in the Sudan* (New York: Africana Publishers, 1981), p. 90.

68. For more on the Anya-Nya, see Cecile Eprile, *War and Peace in the Sudan: 1955–1972* (London: David and Charles, 1974), pp. 90–102, and O'Ballance, *Secret War in the Sudan*, pp. 57–67.

69. After the June 1967 Six Day War, Israel was supporting *Anya-Nya* troops militarily and financially. See, for example, Eprile, *War and Peace in the Sudan*, pp. 140–41; O'Ballance, *Secret War in the Sudan*, pp. 126–28; and ICG, "God, Oil, and Country," p. 10.

70. ICG, "God, Oil, and Country," p. 11.

## SUDAN'S SECOND CIVIL WAR, 1983–2005

What halted Sudan's civil war was the prospect of social, religious, and economic autonomy for the South. So long as that lasted, the incentive for the South to fight would cease. But Sudan, as well as much of the rest of North Africa and the Middle East, could not escape the outside world or its pressures. Unable to defeat Israel militarily, Islamic leaders throughout the region engaged in fierce rhetoric against Israel and advocated for an increasingly conservative brand of Islam. Many of the region's leaders took to supporting terrorism against Israel and repressing non-Muslim minorities within their own countries.

In Sudan, Nimeiri was under constant pressure to abrogate the Addis Ababa treaty and begin the work of securing all of Sudan for "God." This pressure became especially intense following the discovery of oil in the South.

In January 1983, in an act of defiance similar in nature and effect to the mutiny of August 1955, Southern troops of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion refused orders to disarm and be transferred north. After several months of negotiations, in May Nimeiri ordered an attack on the mutineers. Members of the unit fled to neighboring Ethiopia, where they formed the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), the main southern rebel faction led by John Garang.<sup>71</sup>

The Addis Ababa agreement was officially abrogated in June 1983, when Nimeiri issued presidential decree no. 1, which returned regional powers to the central government, ended the autonomy of the South, and divided the latter into three separate and powerless administrative

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71. The SPLA is the armed movement of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). Henceforth, the two entities will be referred to as SPLM/A. In 1991, the leadership of the SPLA split, with a new faction led by an ethnic Nuer, Riek Machar, dubbing itself SPLA-United, which split itself numerous times thereafter. According to one study, the ensuing "internecine fighting soon became more terrible than the war between the Sudanese army and the rebels," and "[s]uch inter-group strife has become the favored activity of the various rebel factions." See "The Self-Mutilation of Sudan," *Swiss Review of World Affairs*, July 3, 1995.

provinces (Upper Nile, Bahr al-Ghazal, and Equatoria).<sup>72</sup> The financial responsibilities of the South were transferred to Khartoum, and Arabic was declared the country's official language. In addition, the central government seized control of the armed forces of the South.<sup>73</sup>

In September 1983, Nimeiri promulgated the so-called September laws, which imposed Islamic religious law (Sharia) on the Sudanese people and sanctioned the use of *hudud* (e.g., physical punishment such as flogging, amputations and cross-amputations,<sup>74</sup> stoning, and execution for various crimes). Southerners labeled the imposition of the harsh laws a “rising tide of Muslim fundamentalism,” which “threatened to unsettle the spirit of tolerance characteristic of the Addis Ababa decade,”<sup>75</sup> and the SPLM/A declared that it would fight until the September Laws were revoked. The SPLM/A, meanwhile, had unified behind Garang. Its objectives were defined more broadly than just Southern autonomy, as they included a call to transform Sudan into a multiracial, multireligious, and multiethnic democratic state.<sup>76</sup>

In 1985, Nimeiri was replaced by Sadiq al-Mahdi, who stood as the democratically-elected prime minister of Sudan until 1989. Al-Mahdi had responded to increasing SPLM/A successes in the field by attempting to negotiate another peace.

On June 30, 1989, Brig. Gen. Omar Hassan al-Bashir seized power in a bloodless coup, toppling the government of Sadiq al-Mahdi. President Bashir, who was born in 1944 about 150 miles south of Khartoum, is a devout Muslim and career soldier who fought in the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars, as well as in Sudan's first civil war.

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72. Administratively, the redivision of the south made little sense, due to the lack of adequate and sufficient personnel to administer even a single administrative unit. J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Requiem for the Sudan: War, Drought, and Disaster Relief on the Nile* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1995), p. 15.

73. Ibid. See also ICG, “God, Oil, and Country,” p. 13.

74. The simultaneous amputation of a person's right hand and left foot.

75. R.K. Badal, “The Addis Ababa Agreement Ten Years After: An Assessment,” in *North-South Relations in the Sudan since the Addis Ababa Agreement* (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1988), p. 32. Cited in Burr and Collins, *Requiem for the Sudan*, p. 16.

76. ICG, “God, Oil, and Country,” p. 13.

The new regime immediately canceled the agreements reached by the al-Mahdi government, which had begun to negotiate with the SPLM/A and even met preconditions for a constitutional conference.<sup>77</sup> Bashir's coup against al-Mahdi was supported, and perhaps planned by, the National Islamic Front (NIF). The NIF expounded a radical Islamic vision and was determined to transform Sudan into a religious society.<sup>78</sup> The NIF's leader, Hassan al-Turabi, is widely believed to have been the key figure behind most of Sudan's policy initiatives until his arrest in 2001.<sup>79</sup>

The new regime quickly moved to destroy all political opposition by abolishing parliament, banning political parties, and imprisoning all party leaders. It imposed a state of emergency and created the Revolutionary Command Council, which served as a cabinet and was chaired by President Bashir. The new regime also closed the newspapers. Leaders of student groups, unions, professional associations, and political parties were arrested and disappeared in "ghost houses" and prisons where they were tortured or murdered.<sup>80</sup> Undeterred by recent successes of the SPLA, which had in part prompted the al-Mahdi government's more conciliatory stance, the Bashir regime intensified the civil war.

Bashir refused to consider revoking Sharia law and, with NIF support and guidance, intensified efforts to force Islam on all Sudanese. As in the previous civil war, religion was not

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77. Burr and Collins, *Requiem for the Sudan*, p. 157.

78. Prior to the 1989 coup, the NIF had not fared particularly well in the country's only national election of 1986, gaining only six percent of the vote. See Randolph Martin, "Sudan's Perfect War," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (March/April 2002), p. 111.

79. After mid-1993 U.S. embassy reporting explicitly acknowledged Turabi's preeminence in the power structure. See Petterson, *Inside Sudan*, p. 85. Burr and Collins, writing about the 1989 coup, say that the coup was carried out by "unsophisticated brigadiers of the Sudan army, supported financially by members of the National Islamic Front. They were soldiers, but the policy decisions were made by the Islamic politicians and polemicists led by Hassan al-Turabi..." Burr and Collins, *Requiem for the Sudan*, pp. 2-3.

80. ICG, "God, Oil, and Country," p. 14.



the only issue of contention between North and South. But increasingly, the Bashir regime described the war as a jihad, and northern Muslim fighters as martyrs.<sup>81</sup>

Although a peace agreement was signed in January 2005, Sudan's civil war is effectively ongoing.

## ANALYSIS

As the history shows, religion played a prominent role in both Sudan's civil wars, with it becoming more central in the second war.

Sudan's two geographic regions are characterized by heterogeneous religious, racial, cultural, tribal, and lingual compositions of its respective populations. Many northern ethnic groups, Deng writes, "are clearly non-Arab, have retained their indigenous languages, practice a pagan version of liberal Islam, and are economically as backward as the South. Many peoples of the South have adopted racial, cultural, and religious elements from the north over a long history of interaction, but have adapted them to their local conditions and assimilated them to such a degree that they are viewed as authentically indigenous."<sup>82</sup>

Further complicating an overly simplistic division between a Muslim North and a Christian and traditional African religious South is the concentration of Christian Southerners in some parts of the North, particularly the area around Khartoum.<sup>83</sup> Western journalists report that Khartoum, in fact, has ceased to be a "distinctly Arab town. ... Now, residents and diplomats

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81. "Islam's Dark Side: The Orwellian State of Sudan," *Economist*, June 24, 1995, p. 21.

82. Ibid.

83. Traditional African religion is oftentimes referred to as "animism," which is a misnomer. Traditional Nilotic religions are theist, and their followers do not subscribe to the animist belief that spirits reside in animals, trees, inanimate objects, and so on. The label "animist beliefs," in addition, has derogatory implications. See Harun Ruun, "Freedom of Religion," in A.H. Abdel Salam and Alex de Waal, eds., *The Phoenix State: Civil Society and the Future of Sudan* (Lawrenceville, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 2001), p. 53. Traditional beliefs are also known as "noble spiritual beliefs." These religions are "organically linked to the societies in which they exist. In the case of Nilotic peoples, for example, cattle play a central role in traditional religion. Oftentimes, belief in traditional religions is not incompatible with belief in Islam or Christianity. Ibid., p. 58.

say, the city is full of people from sub-Saharan Africa—the Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk and Zande—who have brought their traditions with them.”<sup>84</sup>

Nevertheless, Deng concedes that the North-South struggle is key to understanding the conflict in Sudan and that religion is pivotal.<sup>85</sup> Northern Sudan, which constitutes approximately two-thirds of the country’s territory and population, is an intricate and inseparable blend of Islam and the Arabic language, while the South is largely indigenously African, Christian, with a Western orientation.<sup>86</sup>

Although the issue of Sharia law was debated soon after independence, it was not until the ascension of the Nimeiri regime in 1983 and the passage of the September Laws that the North pushed the Islamist agenda more forcefully, and thus helped rekindle the civil war after an eleven-year period of calm. The result was a rise in religious intolerance. Nimeiri introduced Sharia law throughout the country, including in the non-Muslim South, causing tensions between the North and South to flare. Even minor offenses were punished according to Islamic law. Public flogging was administered for minor crimes (e.g., drinking alcohol); stoning for adultery; amputation for theft; and cross-amputation or hanging and crucifixion for armed robbery and murder.<sup>87</sup>

Sudan’s transition to a formally Islamic state was completed in June 1989, following the seizure of power by Bashir. Bashir personified the NIF’s Islamist agenda and added pan-Arab themes to it, saying in 1989 that “Sudan is an Arab country which supports Arab national unity” and advocating a “preferred” economic association that would include Egypt and Libya.<sup>88</sup>

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84. James McKinley Jr., “Sudan Christians Take War’s Culture Clash North,” *New York Times*, April 5, 1998, p. 3.

85. Deng, “Sudan—Civil War and Genocide.”

86. Ibid.

87. Philip Williams, “Sudan Weaves Religion with Politics,” *U.P.I.*, September 25, 1988.

88. *BBC World Service*, 0630GMT, December 7, 1989, cited in Burr and Collins, *Requiem for the Sudan*, p. 252.

Khartoum newspapers reported in the early 1990s that the government “aspired to set up an Arab state from Morocco to Bahrain.”<sup>89</sup>

Since 1989, the national Islamic government has regularly described Sudan’s civil war as a jihad and its soldiers as mujahideen. A report from the mid-1990s, for instance, describes a weekly television program showing carefully edited footage of the northern army’s “glorious victories” and “spectacular shots of soldiers being blown to pieces dissolve into rosy scenes of divine happiness.”<sup>90</sup> And as the Iranian government has done in Tehran, the Northern Sudanese government has named streets in Khartoum after martyrs.<sup>91</sup>

In essence, then, although religion was implicated in Sudan’s first civil war, because Northern (government) forces identified as primarily Arab-Islamic and southern (rebel) forces as primarily Black-Christian,<sup>92</sup> it was not until the Addis Ababa agreement collapsed in 1983 that religion became a central issue of conflict in Sudan’s civil war. The lack of a religious center to the first conflict gave space for negotiations that led to the Addis Ababa agreement and increased social, political, religious, and economic autonomy for the South.

Two of the four hypotheses received support. Hypothesis 2 holds that religion will move from a peripheral to a central issue when local elites attempt to outbid each other in an effort to increase their religious legitimacy with an internal and, in many but not all cases, an external audience. In Sudan’s first civil war, although the sides identified with different religions, the imposition of Islam by the North was not source of the South’s resistance. By all accounts, the

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89. *Al-Sudan al-Hadith* (Khartoum), September 2, 1990, cited in Burr and Collins, *Requiem for the Sudan*, p. 252.

90. “The Orwellian State of Sudan,” p. 21.

91. *Ibid.*

92. As observed above, this is an oversimplification, but not an unreasonable one. The decades-long escalation of conflict to violent conflict, and violent conflict to genocidal conflict in Sudan, as been accompanied by a kind of forced national and religion identification: the strong ethno-religious identity of Northern forces has led inexorably to an increasing (one might accurately say *countervailing*) ethno-religious identity in the South. For other contemporary examples in a civil war context, see Monica Duffy Toft, “Two-Way Mirror Nationalism: The Case of Ajaria,” in Moshe Gammer, ed., *The Caspian Region: The Caucasus* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 3–22.

proximate cause of the first outbreak of violence (the 1955 mutiny) was Southern concern over the systematic denial of civil service posts in the government (including the army). In fact, even six years after General Abboud's so-called Islamization campaign, Southern resistance groups focused their grievances on economic hardship rather than on religious discrimination. The priority of Southern grievances is reflected in a memorandum sent to the Organization for African Unity, in which the Sudan African National Union complained that the North had denied Southerners participation in the administration, stunted Southern economic development, and hampered educational progress. Religious persecution was virtually unmentioned. Moreover, a detailed account of the motivations of Abboud's Islamization campaign reveals that the campaign itself did not constitute a religious bid. Abboud's leadership was not threatened, and the North, by its own calculations, was not at that time seriously threatened by the Anya-Nya.

But in the face of increasing SPLM/A victories, and weakened by the loss of Soviet patronage after 1971, Nimeiri essentially sued for peace, and the Addis Ababa agreement was signed in 1972, leading to eleven years of peace. This raises the question: Why not invoke a religious bid instead of suing for peace?

In 1972, Nimeiri and many Arab leaders were bidding for Soviet support as a way to counter perceived Western support for Israel, and to simultaneously modernize their own countries (and their militaries in particular). The loss of Soviet patronage put Sudan's Northern leaders at a loss as to how to proceed; at the same time, it strengthened the position of the SPLM/A (because Mengistu's Ethiopia was a Soviet client and, partly as a result, a supportive host to Garang). The new type of legitimacy religion provided was soon to emerge, however. Throughout the 1970s the pressure on Nimeiri to accelerate the process of Islamization and to abrogate the Addis Ababa agreement mounted (especially after the discovery of large oil reserves in the South). The

attempted coup by al-Mahdi in 1976 led to Nimeiri's complete conversion to an Islamic justification for Northern aggression in the South. He made Islam the central issue of conflict when he issued the September Laws in 1983, and full-scale civil war resumed.

The problem for Nimeiri personally was not that his religious bids were ill-timed or the wrong sort of bid, but that his past history (after 1971) of repressing Islamic groups made it relatively easy for his rivals (e.g., al-Mahdi and al-Bashir) to criticize him as a fair-weather friend of Islam. How could such a man be trusted? Even al-Mahdi's credibility was eventually called into question by Sudan's current leader, al-Bashir. Aided by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent split of the rebel forces opposing Northern imposition of Islam in the South, al-Bashir has led a radicalized Islamic campaign of genocidal war in the South. In addition, his regime has gained increasing support from other Islamic states in the form of fighters, cash, and arms, while continuing to deflect Western concerns over human rights abuses encouraged by the North in the South.

Hypothesis 2 is therefore supported in the case of Sudan: a succession of Northern leaders, threatened by the military advances of the SPLM/A, tendered competing religious bids to enhance their legitimacy (and attract support) at home and abroad. The bidding process forced religion to the center of what started as a conflict over the distribution of offices and economic resources. The result was a civil war that proved to be one of the twentieth century's longest and most brutal. More case studies will be needed to determine the extent to which this the pattern generally holds true in civil wars.

Hypothesis 3(a)—the more central religion is to a conflict, the less likely the conflict is to end short of a decisive victory—received equivocal support, but remains unrefuted. The logic of Hypothesis 3(a) is that because a direct commandment from God would be necessary to stop a

war previously justified as God's will, religious civil wars in which religion has become a central end short of a decisive outcome should be less likely.<sup>93</sup> The corollary to Hypothesis 3(a) is that should religion move from a central to a peripheral issue, negotiations for lasting peace (such as the Addis Ababa agreement) become not only possible but likely. What then should one make of the January 2005 signing of the Naivasha (North-South) Comprehensive Peace Agreement? Is this a real peace, resulting from a shift of religion from the center or the periphery? Or is it a tactical peace, intended to allow the two sides continue fighting in either a different manner or at a future date?

A statement by Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi perhaps best reflected the diminishing influence of radical Islamists, on the one hand, and Khartoum's persistent commitment to an Islamic agenda on the other: "Ideologically and politically," he told the International Crisis Group, "the form of fundamentalism that was ascendant from 1989 to 1996 in Khartoum is defeated. However, Islamic values are still there, and will be a political factor for a long time. But the virulent, messianic, export-oriented Islamism has dwindled in significance and has become inward-looking."<sup>94</sup>

This interpretation of religion becoming less central, however, is questionable given recent statements by al-Bashir and his government. In 1998, al-Bashir signed a new constitution that guaranteed freedom of religion and racial and political rights. Such laws, however, appear only on paper and not in practice. Al-Bashir and Vice President Ali Osman Taha have been quoted as saying that a secular Sudan is out of the question and that Islam is the religion of the land.<sup>95</sup> One

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93. We should not, however, be surprised by "tactical" cease fires, whose real aim is to either carry on the violence under a different name (or to a different degree), or to simply gather the resources necessary to achieve complete victory at some future date.

94. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, interview with the International Crisis Group, Addis Ababa, July 16, 2001, in ICG, "God, Oil, and Country," p. 23.

95. The Sudanese paper *Al Ray al-Amm* quoted Bashir as saying "no to secularism." The Egyptian news service MENA quoted the Vice President saying, "We do not see that our call to enforce Islam and abide by the Islamic

high-ranking Sudanese government official told the ICG that “[w]e need to add other religions and approaches, not remove Islam from the law and constitution. We simply can’t take it out: it’s life or death.”<sup>96</sup> In fact, al-Bashir himself considers Islam to be the “cornerstone of our policy.”<sup>97</sup> Moreover, the U.S. State Department’s Report on Religious Freedom of 2002 stated that “[Sudan’s] government continued to insist that Sharia law form the basis of a unified state.”<sup>98</sup>

The support for Hypothesis 3(a) in the Sudan case is therefore somewhat mixed. On the basis of my research, I predict that—Naivasha agreement notwithstanding—the current civil war will not truly end until either the North’s leaders are replaced by leaders who repudiate the war’s religious objectives, or the South votes to secede as outlined in the agreement.<sup>99</sup>

Hypothesis 3(b) received strong support in the Sudan case. The more central religion became, the higher the civilian casualties. Sudan’s first civil war did not spare noncombatants, but at the height of the second civil war—which lasted from 1989 until 1996, when the al-Bashir government began to moderate its stance on religion (though Sharia law is still formally the law of the land)—noncombatants were much worse off.<sup>100</sup>

In sum, Sudan’s long civil war was effectively two distinct civil wars with two sets of overlapping actors and causes. In its first civil war, religion was no more important than any other issue, including conflicts over economic autonomy, social practices (education and

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Sharia would undermine the rights of others or endanger the country’s unity.” Quoted in ICG, “Oil, God, and Country,” p. 96.

96. Ibid, p. 96.

97. Ann Mosley Lesch, *The Sudan: Contested National Identities* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 125. Quoted in ICG, “God, Oil, and Country,” p. 19.

98. The United States Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report, 2002.

99. For an assessment of the agreement and the factors that are likely to lead to its collapse see Eric Reeves, “The Slow Collapse of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for South Sudan,” September 24, 2005, <http://www.sudanreeves.org/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=70>.

100. The average number of noncombatant deaths in the second war were three times greater than the average number of noncombatant deaths in the first war.

language), political liberties, and so on. But this civil war, though destructive and costly, was nevertheless stoppable. Religion had not become the central issue of conflict, and when threatened and unsure of what sort of bid to make, Nimeiri opted to compromise, and the two sides were able to negotiate a peace treaty that left both sides better off. The Addis Ababa agreement would last until religious intolerance combined with simple greed to destroy it.

Sudan's second civil war was a civil war in which religion moved from a peripheral issue to become the central issue. The North unilaterally declared the whole of Sudan to be Islamic, and then sought to make that declaration true by means of violence. The North's religious intolerance made it unwilling to compromise on otherwise divisible issues of conflict with the South (as it had previously) until the South had no recourse but to respond by force of arms. The war that followed the North's deliberate abrogation of the Addis Ababa agreement was far more brutal than the first civil war. In it, civilians became the systematic targets of a host of abuses, ranging from forced slavery and mass murder to forced starvation. Millions were killed or forced to flee their homes.

### *Conclusions*

In this essay I established that religion is an increasingly important factor in civil wars especially since the 1990s (the end of the Cold War arguably shifted the utility of different types of bids from secular, ideological issues to ethnonational and religious issues). This, combined with the salience of religiously inspired terror (in particular suicide bombings) and the capacity of religious rule to undermine key pillars of the stability of the state system, may partially explain why the subject of religion and violence continues to capture the attention of



policymakers in both the developed and developing worlds. Religious civil wars are increasingly more common when considered across the decades, and they last longer than nonreligious civil wars.

In addition, Islam has been involved in a disproportionately high number of civil wars as compared with other religions. I argued that the overrepresentation of Islam was likely the result of historical differences between the relationships of religion and temporal authority in the Christian “West” and the Islamic world. In the latter, church and state are much more likely to be fused; whereas after the Thirty Years’ War, “Christian” states abandoned this expression of political authority. Moreover, logically, embattled leaders can expect to obtain relatively higher utility from appeals to religion, when a domestic constituency favors that religion (and possesses resources that may be transferred to the leader as a result of the religious appeal), and when the religion in question has significant extrastate constituencies—such as Islam, which predominates in a broad belt of states ranging from North Africa to Indonesia. Significantly, Islam also has a specific “defense of the religious community as a religious obligation” component. Thus all things being equal, one should expect Islam to play a greater role in civil wars than other religions. We have seen that this is empirically true, and when the time period is considered (1940–2000), along with the establishment state of Israel (1948, 1967) and the steadily increasing importance of petroleum worldwide, the finding that Islam is involved in 80 percent of civil wars seems less surprising (it may be overdetermined).

I also expanded on Snyder’s nationalist outbidding model to argue that civil wars will become religious civil wars when threatened leaders attempt to bolster their survival by making religious bids. I posited four hypotheses and presented the case of Sudan, which actually comprises two cases. The first was a civil war in which religion, though clearly present as an

element of the conflict, was peripheral. The second civil war took a decidedly religious cast. Three of the four hypotheses received support in this case.

Finally, Hypothesis 1 was not tested in this case study, because to assess whether the utility of religious bids is in fact higher in Islamic than non-Islamic states, one would need a careful comparison of the actions (and rationales for actions) of embattled leaders in states that identify strongly with religions other than and including Islam. That analysis must await further research.

Since the end of the Thirty Years' War, and especially following the rise of the middle class in Europe and its cultural descendents, the foundational pillar of the interstate system as well as domestic order within states has been fear of death. Where people generally fear death, the threat of killing them provides sound coercive leverage. Where people generally fear something other than death more than death, the threat of killing them may provide neither leverage nor deterrence. Religion offers just these conditions: believers can suspend fear of death under a much wider set of circumstances than those who do not believe, or whose religions do not feature the promise of a better existence following death.<sup>101</sup>

A more comprehensive analysis of the relationship between religion and civil wars can be expected to yield important theoretical and policy implications. If it is true, for example, that religious fervor generally undermines compromise, then religious belief should be incorporated into bargaining theory rather than shunted aside as a category of irrational action. Religious preferences are rational (at least procedurally), but operate under a different conception of costs and benefits than secular preferences.

In policy terms, the logic of my argument yields a clear implication: Western countries are progressively undermining their security by refusing to decrease their demand for petroleum. The geographic distribution of Islam sits astride much of the world's known (or inexpensively

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101. See Toft, "Time Horizons and Issue Indivibility."

accessible) petroleum reserves. Increasing demand for petroleum results in the accelerating transfer of wealth from the developed world to oil-rich states, and many of these states are represented by Islamic governments—some Arab and some non-Arab—in which faith in God is fused with temporal political authority. They have cash that can be used to buy arms or train fighters. With this supply of conflict resources, these states are in a position to respond to the pleas—where deemed credible—of Islamic leaders in poorer countries, thus fueling the process of bidding, moving religion from the periphery to the center, and resulting in regional and potentially interstate destabilization (not to mention escalating depredations against what most secular states would consider noncombatants).

This problem follows directly from the above analysis, because the only logical solution to the problem of religious civil wars is to reduce the utility of religious bids. Yet as long as Islam controls such increasing wealth, the utility of religious bids will rise. More disturbing still, most oil-rich states, whether Islamic or not, are undertaking to invest their oil wealth in ways that make their wealth likely to increase even if demand for oil should flatten or drop. This “conflict resources” dynamic may also explain why, against all odds, most Muslims worldwide appear to be increasingly attracted to more conservative—and more physically aggressive—interpretations of the Koran and *hadith*. One can hardly imagine embattled leaders attempting to outbid each other in attempts to increase their credibility in more liberal and more moderate interpretations, because, if successful, such schools of Islamic thought would not result in the transfer of fighters or weapons and, as a result, would not logically serve to secure a bidding leader’s tenure.<sup>102</sup>

Finally, another way to address the problem of religious outbidding leading to religious civil wars is to work to reduce the threat leaders feel (i.e., the demand side). True, in many cases this

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102. Somalia is the most recent example, where Islamists seek to defeat secular warlords. See Marc Lacey, “Somali Islamists Declare Victory: Warlords on the Run,” *New York Times*, June 6, 2006, p. A1.

threat will emanate from local competition and where this occurs there is not much an outside power can usefully do to help. But in other cases the source of the threat is external. The Cold War followed the age of colonialism, and both epochs were characterized by dramatic interventions—cultural, religious, economic, and military—in Islamic states. The post–Cold War era has not been one characterized by nonintervention. On the contrary, many Islamic governments feel directly threatened by non-Islamic states, and this perception of threat is something within the power of non-Islamic states to change. It may be, finally, that Western intervention in “self-defense” has, paradoxically, proven to be the primary cause of both the observed increase in religious civil wars, and a perception that religiously inspired terrorism is on the rise.

If my argument is correct, the clear implication is that ending this self-perpetuating (and escalating) cycle of violence will require addressing both the supply of wealth to the Islamic world and the demand for cash, fighters, and arms by many Islamic political elites.

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