Religion and War:
Past, Present,
and Future

by

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Long Term Strategy Group

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April 2007

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The presentation covers:

- a very broad argument about the relevance of religious motivations in military history as a factor influencing actors and their continued relevance today, especially by America's opponents in the Global War on Terrorism;

- a discussion of the importance of the relationship between religion and war;

- the results of a historical study of several hundred wars from 700-1700 C.E.;

- a more detailed evaluation of one particular case, the rise and decline of the Christian Crusades;

- the potential implications for our understanding of the relationship between religion and war in the present and future, focusing specifically but not exclusively on Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism.

Religion and War: Past
Present, and Future

(b)(6)

Long Term Strategy Group

This presentation is titled "Religion and War: Past, Present, and Future". The presentation is designed to make a very broad argument about the relevance of religious motivations in military history as a factor influencing actors and their continued relevance today, especially by America's opponents in the Global War on Terrorism.

My contention is that we can take lessons from the previous historical relationship between religion and war, especially key periods like the Crusades, that may be useful as ways to think about the Global War on Terrorism. In particular, while many people have made a totally valid and I think important analogy between the role of Salafi Jihadism in Islam and Martin Luther and the Reformation in Christianity, I think the best analogy to Salafi Jihadism in military history might be the Christian Crusaders.

What follows are not one-to-one linear policy recommendations, they are ways of thinking about the relationship between religion and war that might be helpful for framing discussions in the Department of Defense.

Holy War: Past

- *"There is no war in the world so just or honorauble. . .as that which is waged for religion, we say for the true, ancient, Catholic, Roman religion. . .Whoever seeketh not after the Lord God of Israel, let him be slain."* English Cardinal Allen, 1583

This first quote from exiled English Cardinal Allen, speaking in the midst of the late 16th century conflict between Spain and England, is remarkable. He is making a clear statement about the importance of religion and the validity of fighting and dying for the cause of Catholicism. More importantly, however, this quote is taken from the very end of the era of Crusading. This was a period in which the importance of religion as a motivating factor for violence among Christians was supposed to be on the decline. That even then it had such sway and provoked such rhetoric indicates there might be something to the relationship between religion and war.

Holy War: Present

- *"The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim. . .This is in accordance with the words of Almighty Allah, "and fight the pagans all together as they fight you all together," and "fight them until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah."* Osama Bin Laden, 1998

This second quote is more familiar. It is from the 1998 Fatwa announced by the World Islamic Front, titled "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders." Note the clear invocation of Islamic duty as the reasoning behind the demand that Muslims rise up to kill Americans and their allies. Scholars like Dan Benjamin and Steve Simon, among others, have noted the careful Islamic construction of these passages and the way Bin Laden tried to craft this call to jihad to appeal to as broad of an Islamic audience as possible.

Presentation Outline

I.   Why Study the Relationship Between Religion and War?

II. Historical Evidence on the Relationship Between Religion and War

III. Example: The Christian Crusades

IV. Is Religion Relevant Today? Tomorrow?

V.   Conclusion

Here is an outline of my presentation. I am going to lay out in a little more detail why I think it is important to study the relationship between religion and war. Then I will discuss the results of a historical study of several hundred wars from 700-1700 C.E. and go into more detail about one case in particular, the rise and decline of the Christian Crusades. Then I will discuss the potential implications for our understanding of the relationship between religion and war in the present and future, focusing specifically but not exclusively on Al Qaeda and the Global War on Terrorism.

Presentation Outline

I. **Why Study the Relationship Between Religion and War?**

II. Historical Evidence on the Relationship Between Religion and War

III. Example: The Christian Crusades

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V. Conclusion

First to outline why it is important to study the relationship between religion and war.

Why Study the Relationship Between Religion and War?

- Era of globalization and transnational identities – enables rise of religion as mobilizing factor

- 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review: America is engaged in a "Long War" against terrorists that cloak their actions in Islam

The 2006 Quadrennial Defense review describes the Global War on Terrorism as a "long war" against a group of people that cloak their actions in the name of Islam.

For the last two hundred years, we have gotten used to a world in which religious motivations have not seemed very important as factors driving international conflict. In contrast to prior "ages", like the Crusades and the 30 Years War, the post-treaty of Westphalia period has been characterized by the prominence of material and sometimes ideological explanations for wars.

However, in an age of globalization with loosening individual ties to the state, it is possible or maybe even likely that forms of self-definition beyond the nation-state, like religion, may become important once again. For if we think that ethnicity, race, and language are important in the post-Cold War era, why not religion?

The Importance of "Religion"

- Operates at level of cognition beyond pure reason
- Speaks to the afterlife – not falsifiable
- Like ethnicity or nationality, mobilization possible to help the group survive
- Individual benefits to participation

It is very difficult to define "religion" – scholars have argued about the precise definition for centuries and this paper is unlikely to settle the dispute. Common definitions include references to the supernatural, explanations of the creation and destruction of the world, ritual, prayer, and discussions of the afterlife, along with many other characteristics. For the purposes of this paper, religion is understood as a set of beliefs generally regarding the supernatural and involving practices designed to justify and explain existence.

Religious belief systems should influence war because the nature of religious claims — the level of cognition at which they operate and their ability to speak to the conditions of existence after death — the afterlife — leads to more devoted participation for those motivated by religion, increasing war intensity. There are two major facets of religious identity generation that are most relevant for the purposes of understanding the link between religion and war.

First, religious beliefs make a higher-order claim on behavior than claims made by groups organized purely along ethnic, linguistic or cultural lines because they deal with the existence of the world, the meaning of life and what happens after death. This means that religious systems can make claims about absolute truth and about whether particular behaviors are ultimately good or bad, saying that recognition of these ideas by people in the material world is not necessary in order for them to be correct. They are correct because the religion is correct. This means religious systems can explain why behavior is a good or bad idea in ultimate and absolute terms. The inherent truth of religious ends, therefore, can justify the pursuit of those ends through whatever means are necessary, legitimizing warfare in some cases.[1]

Second, the ability of religion to make claims about eternity, in the form of explanations about what happens after death, creates a powerful motivating force for behavior. From the idea of reincarnation after death in Hinduism to the idea of Heaven in Christianity and Islam, a critical component of religion as a concept separating it from other things which bind people together is its explanation of the afterlife. Believing that the payoff for a particular action, even if it results in death, is eternal life in paradise, can induce behavior that would normally seem impossible. The ability of religion to explain what will happen to the individual after death can also minimize the fear of death felt by individuals, making them more likely to engage in risky behavior like warfare in the first place or engage in risky behavior within wars, especially when the act of war itself is considered virtuous. The survival instinct, the desire to survive, procreate and live on, is a core human attribute from an evolutionary perspective. If religious groups can use the promise of life after death to cause people to lose their fear of death, this could allow for more intense warfighting or behavior that does not follow strict evolutionary predictions.

[1] The point is not that these things necessarily follow from religious belief, just that a violent actor motivated by religion might think these things.

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Presentation Outline

I. Why Study the Relationship Between Religion and War?

II. **Historical Evidence on the Relationship Between Religion and War**

III. Example: The Christian Crusades

IV. Is Religion Relevant Today? Tomorrow?

V. Conclusion

Now I will discuss the results of a historical data gathering project on the relationship between religion and war.

Historical Trends

- To understand the future, the past may be a better indicator than the present
- Studied 180 religious and non-religious military campaigns from 600-1700 C.E.
- Unit of analysis for the study is the military operation or campaign
- Multi-component vector to determine the religious motivations of each side in a conflict

In the current period, many self-defined enemies of the United States specifically, and the "West" more broadly, use religious rhetoric, specifically the language of Islam, to make arguments about why violent struggle is legitimate and what are the appropriate means of struggle. Given the explicit use of religious language by the self-defined enemies of America, it makes sense to look at the issue of religious warfare from a fresh perspective. Specifically, it makes sense to look back in history at the way in which groups have fought when they have claimed that they are fighting for religious reasons to see if, all other things being equal, there is anything systematically different in the way their wars begin, are fought and are terminated in comparison with actors who do not use religious rhetoric.

The historical trend results are based on a new dataset of 180 religious and non-religious military campaigns from 600-1700 C.E. gathered by the author and other researchers. The unit of analysis for the study is the military operation or campaign.

This approach transcends the eternal debate about whether religious leaders and their believers "actually" believe and are trying to maximize explicitly religious ends based on an understanding of the afterlife, or whether they are acting instrumentally for material or worldly reasons and are just utilizing the rhetoric of religion as a mask for their true motivations. Throughout history and across cultures, whether its use has been instrumental or not, religious language has often crossed the lips of national leaders explaining why their countries should go to war. If there are systematic differences in the way groups who use religious rhetoric behave, and if those differences resemble trends or specific patterns, this paper offers some lessons, albeit imperfect ones, for American decision-makers today in thinking about American strategy in the War on Terrorism.

Measuring the Religiosity of a Side in a Military Campaign

No Religious Influence	Some Religious Influence	Highly Religious
• Some evidence that leaders/soldiers are influenced by religious beliefs in general • Not a primary motivator • Example: US in the Korean War	• Religion a major issue but war of and for a nation-state • Religious freedom considered an issue • Generally national campaign • Example: Sweden in the 30 Years War	• Explicit religious "end" to the war • Religious leaders call for war • Transnational • Example: First Crusade

A sliding scale of religiosity, a multi-component vector, was created to determine the religious influence on behavior based on the extent to which each side in a war demonstrates certain characteristics which are pre-defined as religious. This is difficult because all conflicts probably involve religion to some extent. Using a sliding scale of "religiosity" based on multiple inputs is the best mechanism for creating a defensible and workable point of entry into thinking about religious warfare. The religiosity of each side in a war was therefore measured using the following three-tiered scale.

0: Conflicts where there is some evidence that leaders/soldiers are influenced by religious beliefs in general, like soldier prayer sessions before battle, but there is no evidence of systematic, leader-run campaigns to promote the war based on religion. Religion may also have some implicit influence on the conduct of the war, insofar as religious norms influence national and international law concerning the treatment of wounded enemies on the battlefield or prisoners of war, but it is not a primary motivator.

Key Preliminary Example: In the explanation and execution of the Korean War, there was not a strong attempt by the American government or major religious figures to justify the war or particular behaviors in the war on religious grounds.

1: Conflicts where religion is either a major issue in itself or a major motivator for the conflict, possibly including authorization for war by religious leaders, but the war itself is conducted by a nation-state by and for the purposes of the state.

Key Preliminary Example 1: Saudi Arabia receiving religious authorization before participation in the first Gulf War against Iraq.

Key Preliminary Example 2: Sweden in the 30 Years War.

2: Conflicts where religious issues are an explicit end of the conflict, rather than just a means to other ends like territorial control. The key difference between this and the previous level is that religion is an end in itself in the conflict and a primary motivator — while nation-states may participate in the conflict, the purpose of the conflict is not to advance the interests of the nation-state. The key is the attempt by one or all participants in the conflict to advance religious goals.

Key Preliminary Example: The initiation of the First Crusade, which drew together forces from several nationalities and was initially conceived not to advance the material interests of any particular European nation-state, but to advance the interests of Catholicism.

Determining which actions fall into which categories was conducted with indicators such as declarations of war by religious leaders, whether or not a political leader sought religious approval before beginning a war, the types of religious rituals conducted by a military before, during and after campaigns, and specific references in strategic and tactical instructions to behaviors based on sacred texts. It is important to note that the medium category of religious influence is quite intense in comparison with the religious incentives of most modern actors. It is defined as including wars led by secular authorities and for the purpose of secular authorities, but where there is explicit and persistent religious rhetoric in support of the war. So grouping the medium and high categories on occasion for analytic reasons makes sense. Both the medium and high categories represent degrees of interlinkage between religion and war which are much higher than those acknowledged by most traditional scholars of war.

Historical Trend Results

- War Duration: Religiously-motivated actors either fight decisive battles or end up fighting really long wars: 82% fight decisive battles, in comparison with only 48% of non-religious initiators.

- War Success: Actors with intense religious motives appear to succeed in warfare: Religiously motivated initiators emerged victorious 61% of the time, in comparison with 51% for non-religious initiators.

- War Initiation: Actors with intense religious motives appear to initiate more wars: 84% of religiously-motivated states initiated a war, in comparison with 48% of their non-religious counterparts.

The results show three implications of the heightened intensity of religiously-motivated actors in warfare. First, religiously-motivated actors, with absolute belief in their goals, appear to have strong preferences for fighting decisive battles, fighting them much more frequently than non-religious actors. The faith-based belief in the validity of their actions, combined with the lessened fear of death, makes pressing for a confrontation more likely for religious actors. When a decisive battle does not occur, religious wars tend to last substantially longer than other types of wars, in part probably because there are spiritual benefits for continuing the struggle even in the absence of total victory. For example, in his campaign against the Saxons in the early 780s, which began in response to a Saxon attack on a Christian mission, an enraged and devout Charlemagne pursued a two-pronged war strategy. First, he attempted to engage the forces of Saxon leader Widukind immediately. But when that failed, he escalated the conflict and began a total war that featured mass deportations and executions of those who refused to convert, including 4500 people in one incident at Verden. In the end, Charlemagne gained control of the territory and stood as godfather during the baptism of Widukind. Charlemagne's religious fervor influenced the intensity of the struggle, his search for an early decisive battle and his total war approach when his rapid termination strategy failed.

Second, religiously-motivated actors appear to succeed in warfare at higher relative rates than their non-religious counterparts, especially for religiously-motivated war initiators. The ability of religion to provide a clear sense of purpose and reduce the fear of death in battle may provide religiously-motivated armies with greater morale and unit cohesion, improving their fighting capacity in a way that overcomes the potential downsides of greater risk-taking. The comparison of Arab armies in the Middle East before and after the rise of Saladin provides an interesting example of the power of religion. When the First Crusade took Jerusalem in 1099, it conquered a region beset by sectarian conflict that did not view the Crusades in religious terms. In contrast, Saladin built a power base in the mid/late 12th century in part on his genuine piety and ability to frame the necessity of war against the Crusaders in religious terms. By mobilizing the Arab world along religious lines, Saladin unified the disparate Syrian and Egyptian claimants to the caliphate and raised an army which successfully re-took Jerusalem and permanently broke the back of European Crusader control in the Levant.

Third, religiously-motivated actors appear to engage in more risky behavior in general. Both anecdotal evidence and more systematic results from data analysis show a higher propensity for risky decisions by religiously-motivated actors. It is possible that religious actors, because they believe God inspires their course of action and it is therefore impossible for them to be wrong, severely discount the material costs to their policy positions. For example, despite mounting costs and growing evidence that it could fracture his empire, Philip II of Spain refused to dedicate any more resources or time to the Netherlands conflict than was absolutely necessary. Instead, Philip was committed to two things: bringing Catholicism back to England and preventing the Ottoman conquest of Europe. He viewed both in religious terms, leading him to place a higher priority on them than he otherwise might have, a fact he himself acknowledged. The cost was greater unrest in the Netherlands and its eventual independence, which had a substantial long-term impact on Spanish interests.

Religion and Decisive Battles

		No Decisive Battle			Decisive Battle		
		Side B Religious Intensity			Side B Religious Intensity		
		Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Side A Religious Intensity	Low	26	8	0	21	9	1
	Medium	12	2	4	13	19	2
	High	4	0	0	8	11	0

If religion does serve to intensify motivations, religiously motivated actors should be more susceptible to engaging in decisive battles. The data presented in Table 6 below shows a definitive link between religious intensity and the propensity to engage in decisive battles. 82% of the cases where Side A possessed a high degree of religious intensity, 19 of 23, ended in a decisive battle. While 65% (34 of 52) of the cases featuring a medium level of religious intensity by Side A also end in decisive battles, only 48% of cases where the religious intensity level is low, 31 of 65, ended in a decisive battle. The results mostly hold for Side B as well. While less than 50% (3 of 7) of defending states with high levels of religious intensity engage in decisive battles, the total sample is extremely small. Moreover, almost 80% (39 of 49) of defending states with a medium level of religious intensity engage in decisive battles, in comparison with exactly 50% of low-level religious intensity cases (42 of 84) ending in decisive battles. The results show a clear and significant relationship between religious beliefs and the propensity of leaders to choose a decisive battle strategy.

Note: A Pearson Chi Square test (Pearson Chi2(2)= 9.69 Pr=.008) further demonstrates that the linkage between religious intensity and the propensity to engage in decisive battles is likely to be causal rather than just spurious correlation.

Religion and Campaign Duration
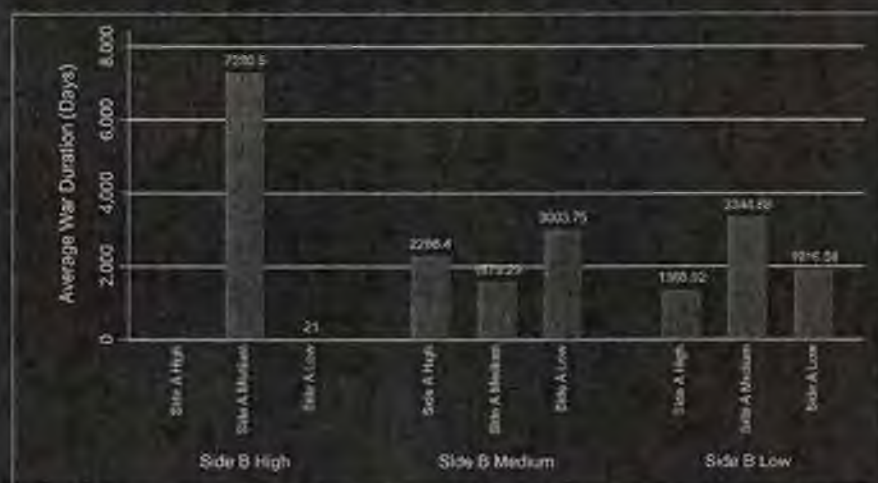
In general, the argument that religiously-motivated actors will be more actively engaged in the war leads to an expectation of longer war durations than for other types of actors. Religiously-motivated states should be less willing to concede and end a war if they are losing because they derive external benefits, in the form of spiritual goods, from fighting and losing. Messianic religious groups, in particular, may believe help is always around the corner or that losing the war is a necessary part of God's plan, so continuing to fight creates the condition in which salvation, in a literal and/or spiritual way, occurs.

Figure: Religion and Campaign Duration
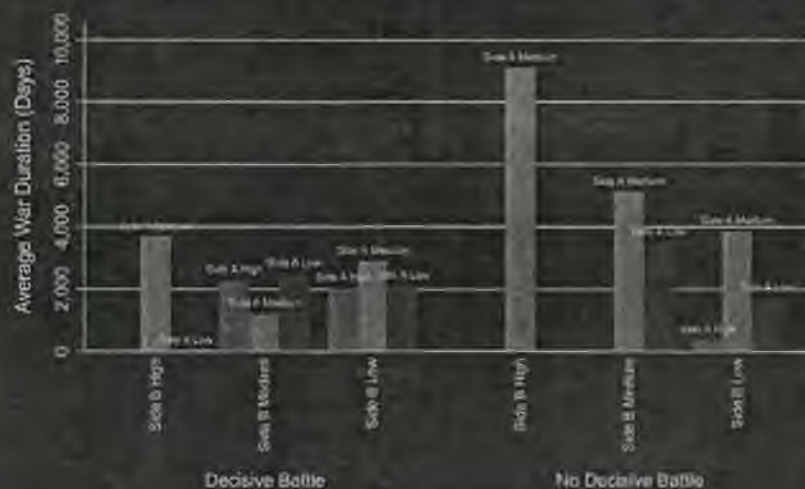
The same logic that might make religiously oriented states more likely to extend the duration of wars could also lead to shorter war durations in some contexts. The explanation above for why religiously motivated states are often "successful" in war — the motivational benefits of religious belief — may also cause those victorious wars to be shorter by helping states win quickly, shortening the duration of wars that might get drawn out otherwise. More importantly, the preference for decisive battles should lead to shorter wars. By definitionally making stalemates less likely, the preference for decisive battles among religiously-motivated war participants could also lead to shorter war durations. Figure 1 below shows the relationship between religious intensity and war duration. The vertical bars are the average (mean) war duration for each unique combination of possible religious intensity levels for Side A and Side B, meaning that there are 9 possible bars, since there are three levels of religious intensity for each side

While religiously motivated actors appear to favor decisive engagements, some of the longest wars which lack decisive engagements appear to have religious motivations. This is consistent, for example, with our understanding of the Ghazis, Islamic raiders on the Ottoman frontier in the 15th and 16th centuries. Ghazis engaged in constant, low-level violence without clear territorial goals. The combination of medium or strong religious motivations on the part of both Side A and Side B, in cases where there is no decisive battle, causes substantial increases in war duration. This provides evidence in favor of the importance of religious motivations and helps bolster the previously described results about decisive battles — when possible religious groups will seek decisive engagements to achieve total victory over their opponents, but when decisive engagements are not possible, they seek to extend the conflict and perpetuate the state of war.

Results: War Outcomes

- Religiously-motivated actors achieve more relative success in war than other types of actors
- Initiating states with heavy religious motivations win 61% of the time
- Initiating state with a medium level of religious motivation win 53% of the time
- Initiating states which are not motivated by religion at win just 51% of the time

		Side A Win			Side B Win		
		Side B Religious Intensity			Side B Religious Intensity		
		Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
Side A Religious Intensity	Low	25	9	0	13	7	1
	Medium	17	9	2	8	10	2
	High	6	8	0	5	2	0

If religious motivations matter, religiously-motivated actors will achieve more relative success in war than other types of actors. Table 5 below shows the relationship between the intensity of religious beliefs held by Side A and Side B and likely war outcomes. Initiating states with heavy religious motivations win 14 of their 23 wars, or 61% of the time, achieving a higher percentage of victories than initiating states with a medium level of religious motivation, who win 28 of their 52 wars, or 53% of the time, or initiating states which are not motivated by religion at all, who win 34 of their 66 total wars, or 51% of the time.

An example of the linkage between religious motivations and battlefield performance comes from the armies of Charlemagne. Pastors exhorted soldiers to confess their sins to God and preached that violence, while sinful, was ultimately justified as part of God's plan. For example, during the siege of Pavia in 773 C.E., which was part of Charlemagne's campaign against the Lombards, he insisted on the construction of a chapel in his camp to facilitate religious devotion by his soldiers. Charlemagne's war aims were also in part influenced by his religious beliefs. His war against the Saxons in the early 780s, while brewing for years due to border disputes, was triggered when the Saxons attacked a Christian mission. An important war aim in the Saxon campaign was their conversion to Christianity – when the Saxons were finally defeated in 785, Charlemagne even stood as godfather to Widukind, the Saxon leader, who agreed to convert. The practices Charlemagne employed in the Saxon campaign were much harsher than in many of his previous campaigns. He outlawed paganism and any threats to members of clergy, as well as cremation and failing to eat according to Christian dictates. The punishment for violating these rules was death. Charlemagne also organized large-scale deportations of people in defeated Saxon areas who refused to convert to Christianity. Essentially, the war was much more intense than were many of his other wars and one overriding factor appears to have been his religious conviction that the defeat and conversion of the Saxons was necessary.

Limitations

- Historical trend analysis is just that — historical. Not a substitute for in-depth analysis of the challenges of the present and future
- Research almost entirely based in English-language sources, skewing the distribution of cases included in the data
- Not possible to get data on every conflict during the scope of the entire study period

It is important to recognize the limitations to our broad research on the historical relationship between religion and war. Acknowledging the limitations can help hedge against misinterpretation of the results while also setting the table for future research.

1. Most importantly, these results are historical trends. They are suggestive of potential relationships. The preceding slides show large-scale relationships that appear to hold across space and time. But they should not be interpreted to mean that in a given situation, a religiously or non-religiously motivated actor will definitely behave in a particular fashion. Context matters. The results do show, however, behavioral tendencies that are more or less likely to emerge, providing a baseline for policy analysis of future conflicts.

2. These results are a sample – nothing more and nothing less. With limited time and resources it was not possible to gather all of the information we wanted to gather on every war in the database. This places clear limits on the results

3. War encyclopedias by scholars like Clodfelter and Dupuy constituted the main source from which we created our database of wars. While these sources are excellent sources of information, they are clearly biased towards European wars, and especially European wars for which there are English-language sources. This means wars from other continents, as well as wars featuring non-English speaking countries, are relatively underrepresented in the data, skewing the results. Future research should certainly try to correct this issue.

Presentation Outline

I. Why Study the Relationship Between Religion and War?

II. Historical Evidence on the Relationship Between Religion and War

III. **Example: The Christian Crusades**

IV. Is Religion Relevant Today? Tomorrow?

V. Conclusion

Now to turn to the specific case of the Christian Crusades as an example of religiously-motivated warfare that is potentially relevant for understanding Salafi Jihadists today.

What Were the Crusades?

- Defined theologically, not on the basis of territory – campaign authorized by the Pope for which participants received spiritual benefits, i.e. indulgences
- First Crusade: Initiated by Pope Urban II at Clermont in 1095, ended with conquest of Jerusalem in 1099

Explaining the rise and fall of the Crusading movement requires defining what a Crusade was and what it was meant to support. However, there is no clear answer to these questions. Debates among scholars in several fields about how to define and bound the question of Crusading remain active. *This presentation defines a Crusade as a military campaign called forth by the Pope as a modified armed pilgrimage and offering participants the remission of all sin, also known as the Crusading indulgence, in exchange for participating for the glory of God.* This definition is consistent with what is often called the "pluralist" school of Crusading historiography.

Key Points of First Crusade:

•The main body of Crusaders left for the Levant throughout 1096

•Crusading army massed at Constantinople in the spring, departing in May 1096.

•Three-year assault on the Holy Land – Unlikely military victory to capture Jerusalem

•Multinational conglomerate with little in common other than Christianity traveled thousands of miles through the lands of multiple hostile opponents and conquered Jerusalem

•Success of the First Crusade represented a degree of power projection and extended campaigning still difficult for many armies today

•Military campaign made possible by unique period of Muslim weakness

•Seljuk sultans lost authority and disputes between the twin power poles of Baghdad and Cairo weakened both.

The Legacy of the Crusades: Persistent Failure

- Nearly every "numbered" Crusade from the 2nd Crusade onwards is a failure
- Some successes in internal Crusades against "heretics", like the Albigensian Crusade
- Fall of Acre in 1291 ends the Crusader foothold in the Levant
- Crusading persists for almost 300 more years

Following the defeat of the Second Crusade, which fueled the first serious criticisms of the Crusades, the strategic draw of the Third Crusade, which did not restore Jerusalem to the Crusaders, and the debacle of the Fourth Crusade, when the Crusaders ignored direct papal orders and violently sacked Constantinople, Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) proposed a series of reforms designed to reinvigorate the Crusading movement.

While legitimizing internal crusades against "heretics" like the Albigensians – which did succeed, though at high cost – the legacy of failure continued and deepened. The Crusade launched by the Fourth Lateran Council, sometimes called the Fifth Crusade, attacked Cairo and collapsed. One exception was the diplomatic success of the Crusade of Frederick II, who secured Jerusalem for the Crusaders for ten years, before it permanently left the hands of the Crusaders in 1244.

In the mid-13th century, one last burst of European Crusading in the Holy Land occurred. Louis IX of France, arguably the last king willing to personally sacrifice for the purpose of capturing the Holy Land, initiated two Crusades, one beginning in 1248 and the other beginning in 1270. Neither gained new territory or significantly aided the Crusader states in preserving existing territory. Edward I of England then Crusaded to Syria to aid the Latin East in 1271, but left the next year after very little activity. In 1268 the Crusader stronghold at Antioch fell, eliminating the last major strategic roadblock to full Muslim control of the Levant. Tripoli fell in 1289, followed by Acre in 1291, the final defeat of the Crusaders in the Levant.

Interestingly, the institution of Crusading persisted for almost 300 more years. Dozens of Crusades were authorized every half century from the fall of Acre through the mid-16th century. The last known Crusade on record was the Spanish Armada in 1588, for which the Pope issued a Crusading Bull and offered indulgences to both participants and those willing to fund the expedition.

What Drove the Institution of Crusading?

| Crusaders | Tacit Supporters Of Crusading | Non-Supporters |
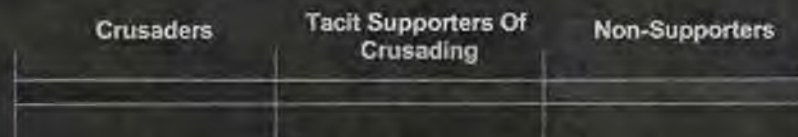
- Religious devotion genuinely characterized the motivations of enough Crusaders to keep the institution alive despite material failures
- Segment of tacit supporters had enough resources to supply the Crusaders
- Most knights in most generations did *not* Crusade

The persistence of the movement over five hundred years of almost continual defeats, the rise of the nation-state and nationalism and multiple canonical developments highlights an adaptability which a materialist explanation would not predict. Only a combination of pure devotion and social networks provides a functional explanation of the late Crusading centuries given mounting failures over time that must have weighed heavily on military leaders and church officials

One way to think about support for the Crusades is to view society as made up of three pools of people: those willing to participate in religious wars, those willing to support (financially or otherwise), but not participate in, religious wars and those not willing to participate in or support religious wars. As failures and costs mounted over the centuries, more and more people shifted from the first and second categories into the third, but the institution of Crusading persisted.

While structural issues like economic, political, and geostrategic shifts chipped away at the support base of the Crusades within European society, the impact of structural change was slow and incomplete. A steady population of willing Crusaders remained well after alternative explanations would have predicted the end of Crusading due to a growing legacy of failure and ever-increasing costs. While support from society at large gradually eroded with more people becoming skeptical of Crusading, opposition generally remained muted, especially on a larger scale.

Why Did Crusading Last For So Long?

- Constraints on large-scale competing ideas in European society
- Key period of decline in Crusading in the mid-16th century in between the Fifth Lateran Council and the Council of Trent
  - Beginning of the Reformation
  - Growth of secular nationalism

The case of the Crusades demonstrates the importance of new religious ideas in generating shifts in theological systems over time and the strong resistance of ingrained religious ideas to changing material conditions – even very powerful conditions. In the Crusading theology case, the institution of Crusading persisted for several hundred years despite manifest structural obstacles, including a plague that wiped out a third of Europe, the growth of competing imperial structures represented by the Mongols and Ottomans, growing nationalism that de-centered religion as the locus of identity and a Protestant alternative to the previous Catholic monopoly on Christianity in Western Europe. Even if one views the last formal Crusade as the Spanish Armada in 1588, it is still true that the Crusading tax in Spain persisted until the early 20th century, the Hospitallers controlled Malta until 1798, and it is possible, though unconfirmed, that Popes granted Crusading indulgences in the 17th century to soldiers defending European cities from the Ottomans. This remarkable resilience was complemented and aided by the ability of the Catholic Church to adapt the Crusading institution to changing times. As the professionalization of warfare increased in early-modern Europe, Crusading changed with the times and the fundraising aspect of the Crusades became more prominent and the taking of the cross itself less prominent.

This highlights just how hard it is to cause theological shifts, especially when social in-groups of believers cause reinforcement. Material factors chipped away at the societal support base for the Crusades, but that may have made the remaining supporters even more dogmatic as they likely developed a siege mentality in compensation. But even as the population of those willing to participate in or financially support Crusades decreased, there was still enough residual support to fund multiple wars in the 16th century. Like aircraft carriers, religious interpretations cannot shift on a dime.

In contrast to the various economic glory explanations, participation in a Crusade was an expensive affair – much more expensive than a typical war in the Middle Ages. The costs involved in Crusading represented a severe dislocation, requiring a serious investment that was unlikely to be recouped. The total cost for a poor knight was about four times his annual income and probably presented a financial problem for wealthier knights as well. The Vatican recognized the high costs of Crusading from the outset; Pope Urban II explicitly asked richer Crusaders to help subsidize their less wealthy counterparts. As Jonathan Riley-Smith, a prominent scholar of the Crusades, writes "There is very little evidence for the Crusaders coming home wealthy . . .All Crusaders had faced potentially crippling expenses and they and their families had pledges to redeem." That the Crusades were not only expensive but participants knew they were expensive when they embarked upon them provides strong evidence against the argument that Crusading was a means of economic expansion. For example, the Charters, or agreements dealing with the distribution of their assets, left behind by participants on the First Crusade highlight their awareness of the high costs from the beginning. Crusaders mortgaged land, sold land, and made a variety of other costly economic deals all to fund their participation on the First Crusade.

The more complex economic explanation is the safety valve argument that demographic pressures drove mostly younger sons to Crusade as a way to achieve economic gains. However, there is no evidence that a disproportionate number of Crusaders, in comparison with other wars, were younger sons. In fact, the charters described by Riley-Smith with regards to the elite social status of most early Crusaders have been cited by Madden as providing definitive proof that the demographic safety valve argument is empirically incorrect. Most Crusaders were lords of their manors, not younger sons. And if most Crusaders not only ended up poorer after the Crusades but knew that the Crusades would impose an economic burden on their families, it seems unlikely that either younger sons or their families would have pressed strongly for participation due to dreams of economic gain. As Riley-Smith wrote, "Anyone who thought there was much to gain out of the Crusades to the East would have been mad." The demographic safety valve argument also cannot explain the timing of the First Crusade, since the economic pressures cited by its advocates existed for a hundred years prior to the Crusade. Additionally, the social networks that served as the locus for recruiting Crusaders provides evidence against a younger sons-demographic pressure explanation. Dense social networks with interlocking family ties playing an important role in stabilizing family status within society applied to younger sons just as much as to older sons. Especially given the economic costs of Crusading, sending a younger son to Crusade was not a cost-free way to solve a simple inheritance issue .

Presentation Outline

I. Why Study the Relationship Between Religion and War?

II. Historical Evidence on the Relationship Between Religion and War

III. Example: The Christian Crusades

IV. Is Religion Relevant Today? Tomorrow?

V. Conclusion

Now to turn from the past to the present to talk about the relationship between religion and war in the current period and in the future, focusing specifically on Salafi Jihadism and Al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda Today

- Plain meaning of Fatwa's by Osama Bin Laden and his associates clearly indicate the importance of religion as a motivating factor
- Religion appears to influence today's Salafi Jihadist's in two ways:
  - Desire to overthrow apostate regimes in the Middle East
  - Achieve individual spiritual benefits through violent *Jihad*
- Reasonable disagreement over the priority of these two factors

On 23 February 1998, Osama Bin Laden issued a *fatwa*, or Islamic legal opinion, stating that due to the threat posed by the United States and its allies to the Islamic world, it was a moral obligation for Muslims everywhere to kill both American military personnel and civilians. It is impossible to distinguish the text, as a document, from its religious content. The document quotes the Qur'an to emphasize and make several points, including the justification for killing Americans and the spiritual rewards awaiting those who do God's will. The easiest reading of the document, the "plain meaning," to borrow a term from the legal realm, would prioritize Bin Laden's interpretation of Islam as a key factor motivating his behavior. Yet many mainstream strategic analysts in America and around the world have gone through analytic gymnastics in order to avoid giving religious motivations causal priority. It is true that some scholars of terrorism do argue that religious motivations play an important role in driving behavior, especially the strategy of suicide bombing that has grown in popularity over the last few decades. In general, however, even as scholars of international politics focus intently on the role of factors like race and ethnicity in warfare, religion is still under-explored.

At present, the Middle East and much of the Islamic world is characterized by weak or autocratic institutions combined with relatively powerful – and more credible in the eyes of the people – religious authorities. So many Muslims around the world have relatively weak national ties but relatively strong religious ties. This combination naturally leads to behaviors like the promotion of territories as important for religious reasons and creates a set of circumstances in which religiously-motivated violence becomes more plausible.

For those genuinely motivated by religion in the Global War on Terrorism, it seems that two interrelated motivations probably influence their behavior; the desire to restore strict Islamic rule to at least the complete Arabian peninsula but possibly larger territorial areas, and the desire to engage in actions pleasing to Allah through participating in violent Jihad against apostates and heretics. These motivations are not inconsistent with one another. Recent research by Will McCants shows the importance of the Jihadist vision concerning the restoration of Islamic rule as a motivating factor for many participants. On the individual level, the knowledge that participation in violent actions will garner spiritual benefits for the participant in the afterlife also plays a role in providing a motivation to fight even when the cause seems lost and quelling fears related to dying.

Are Salafi Jihadists the New Crusaders?

- Comparison generally made between Salafi Jihadists and the Protestant Reformation
- The Jihadi understanding of "Salvation" is also very reminiscent of Crusading theology:
  - Unique importance of territory for spiritual reasons
  - Salvation by works rather than faith – this is critical to any coherent doctrine of holy war
  - Growing justification for separation from non-believers rather than co-existence

The most common Christian theological reference for the Salafi Jihadists of today is the Christian reformation period. Some compare the Jihadists to the Protestant reformers, attempting to enact widespread religious reforms through a return to a more pure "original" interpretation of religious practice. Others compare the Jihadists to the Anabaptists or other splinter groups during the 15th or 16th century. The idea is that while the Jihadists are waging warfare against the "West", their main target are what they view as apostate regimes throughout the Islamic world whose governments should convert to Islamic rule.

This analogy very well may be true. But another analogy, and potentially a more ominous one, exists between the Crusaders of the past and the Salafi Jihadists of the present. While all analogies are limited and there are many differences, some important similarities exist:

1. The importance placed on territory for explicitly religious reasons and the willingness to engage in behavior seen as very risky by others (Jerusalem for the Crusaders, both Jerusalem and the general Arabian Peninsula for the Jihadists).

2. Religious Content: Both groups belief that salvation happens for the individual by both faith and works. The notion of salvation by works, which distinguishes Catholic Christians from their Protestant counterparts, is one of the things that enabled the Crusades. The Pope granted indulgences to Crusaders, promising salvation in return for participation in a military campaign. Salafi Jihadists similarly believe that engaging in violent Jihad against the West will help them garner special spiritual benefits and speed their trip to Paradise. In fact, the decentralized nature of the Salafi belief structure, which lacks a clearly defined authority figure like the Pope, arguably could accelerate the prevalence of this type of behavior. There is no clear limiting function on the ability of Salafi subgroups to believe engaging in particular violent actions besides what they think is reasonable based on their interpretation of Scripture. Now this will clearly limit behaviors in some ways, but it is different than having a clear authority figure like a Pope. While the Pope did not have universal powers during the Crusading period, those that Crusaded believed in Papal authority

3. Political Context: The violent Islamists today exist in a political environment characterized by relatively low nationalism and relatively high religiosity. This is similar to the political environment in which the Crusades emerged.

Are They Just Fighting For Territory?

- Popular belief that religious motivations matter significantly less than factors like the desire to control territory
- While territorial control matters, religion matters as well:
  - The valuing of territory for religious reasons
  - The globalization of terror operations without a clear territorial goal

Some scholars, most notably Robert Pape of the University of Chicago, argue that religion is not a useful frame for thinking about the motivations of those that violently oppose the United States. His study of suicide terrorist groups around the world attempts to show that, rather than religion, it is the desire to control territory that motivates most groups. When the West "invades", people naturally fight back.

There is some merit to this viewpoint. The perception of Western military and even potentially economic and cultural forces as "occupiers" undoubtedly plays a role in motivating violent Jihadist groups. It is also likely true that some members of groups and even some of the leadership would likely engage in violent actions against the United States in places like Iraq whether or not they claimed the mantle of religion as a motivating factor for their claims.

However, reducing the phenomenon of violent Islamism to a secular struggle for territory is flawed for two reasons:

1. Incidents ranging from 9/11 to bombings in London, Madrid, and Bali demonstrate the globalization of violent Islamism, showing that local desires for immediate territorial control are not always at work in acts of terrorism. In particular, events like the London bombings, where local actors linked up with the global Al Qaeda movement, show that transnational motivations like religion are playing an important role.

2. Religion informs many of the reasons particular territories are valued: Jerusalem, Mecca, Medina, etc. These territories are given special importance because of their religious significance. For example, Pape argues that Saudi Arabia felt militarily "occupied" by the United States in the 1990s. How is this possible given that the United States merely had military bases on Saudi soil in a way similar to American relationships with dozens of other countries? The answer lies in the importance placed on the Arabian peninsula in Islamic theology and the command that heretical military forces should not be allowed on the peninsula. So the presence of American forces as allies of the Saudi government was perceived as occupation for religious, rather than secular, reasons.

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Implications of Historical Research for Global War on Terrorism

- Economic and other material benefits can chip away at the support network for Salafi Jihadism but cannot end it
- Victory should be defined by reducing the threat, rather than elimination – true eradication nearly impossible in the short-to-medium term
- Structural theological alternatives necessary, but cannot be promoted by the West and especially the United States

This study emphasizes the importance of new religious ideas in generating shifts in theological systems over time and the strong resistance of ingrained religious ideas to changing material conditions – even very powerful conditions.

In the case of the Crusades, economic factors undermined societal support for Crusading, but a core of supporters carried on for decades if not centuries. Despite declining public support for Crusading, the institution persisted and funded wars through the late 16th century. Religious interpretations most often change slowly and for internal reasons. We should not expect violent Islamism to suddenly "end" either in response to short-term economic incentives or political shifts. This is a long term process.

Given the likely longevity of any campaign, victory will not occur with the eradication of the last violent Islamist – because such an event will be almost impossible to achieve (or even to know if it has been achieved). Instead, victory should be defined by a sustainable reduction in the relative threat level to the United States and its allies around the world. The lower the threat, the better we are doing.

The presentation of legitimate alternative ways of generating identity and social interaction is critical in shifting beliefs. In the Crusades case, the rise of nationalism and Protestantism did not bring down the Crusading movement by themselves – Crusading existed for decades or even centuries after both began and was arguably reeling even before they existed in the popular consciousness. However, both provided alternative ways for members of society to view themselves. But it will be difficult if not impossible for the United States to explicitly promote these alternatives. The more indigenous they are and they seem, the more likely they are to gain local adherents and the more likely they are to succeed.

One thing the United States could do to help indirectly support reformers is more fully engage in information operations designed to defeat Jihadi propaganda. Instead of allowing Al Qaeda and its allies to twist any American actions into "victories" for Al Qaeda and the cause of Salafi Jihadism, the United States need to be more active in supporting print and electronic media to combat the Salafi Jihadist message. Cold War information operations against the Soviet Union may present one model for how to structure such a campaign, though some substantial differences may exist.