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The Cult of Coercion:  
Religion and Strategic Culture in British Counterinsurgency

By

Jason Klocek

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requirements for the degree of

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in

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in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Ron E. Hassner, Chair

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Professor Michaela Mattes

Professor Ann Swidler

Professor Steven Weber

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## Abstract

The Cult of Coercion: Religion and Strategic Culture in British Counterinsurgency

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Jason Klocek

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Why are religious civil wars so difficult to resolve peacefully? This dissertation argues that states, not just insurgents, drive the intractability of religious conflicts. More specifically, it draws on insights from social psychology, along with religious and strategic studies, to develop and test a novel theoretical framework for why and when government officials refuse to compromise with opposition movements that mobilize along religious lines.

The argument posits that Western political and military elites share a secular strategic culture that heightens the correspondence between religious insurgents' behavior and motives. This cognitive bias leads decision makers to infer that religious guerrillas fight to radically alter the status quo, rather than protest unfavorable conditions, such as poverty or territorial occupation. It is most influential when religious demands represent a central incompatibility in the conflict and counterinsurgents face an unfamiliar faith tradition. Ultimately, government officials discount the efficacy of a negotiated settlement because they conclude their opponents will stop at nothing to achieve their objective. It is not that religious insurgents are necessarily unwilling to make concessions; it is that they cannot credibly do so.

These claims are tested with comparative evidence from British counterinsurgency campaigns during the early postwar period with an emphasis on Mandatory Palestine, Cyprus, and Kenya. The dissertation draws on original data collected from more than a half dozen archives in Great Britain, Cyprus, and Israel. This includes documents from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and housed at The National Archives of the United Kingdom that have only been available to the public since 2013. For each case, process tracing is employed to show as explicitly as possible the link between British decision-makers general beliefs about religion and their strategic preferences over the course of the conflict.

The dissertation's argument and findings challenge the influential notion that dissidents' spiritual beliefs alone drive civil wars to endure longer and remain resistant to bargained solutions. In addition, they promise to augment the study of religious conflict by establishing a research agenda on the role of state forces in such engagements.

This dissertation is dedicated to the students of PS123J, especially the founding members of the K.L.F. It was through your eyes that I saw who I might yet still be.

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My sincere gratitude, first and foremost, goes to the advisors that walked beside me during my time at Berkeley. They did much more than merely provide advice on research designs, query the logic of my theoretical claims, and comment on various drafts. My dissertation committee provided a collegial, engaging, and affectionate environment in which to explore, laugh, take intellectual risks, fail, and pick myself up again. I remain deeply appreciative of the seriousness with which they considered my ideas, the thoughtfulness with which they pushed back against those oftentimes naïve impressions, and the fact that they saw where I was going with this project long before I did.

It was an off-hand remark by Leo Arriola during my prospectus defense that first made me consider whether there might be something unique to how states construe religious insurgent groups. It took another two years of that comment niggling at the back of my mind before I finally paid it serious attention. Once my argument started to come together, Leo further shaped this project by adding an intellectual discipline to my analysis and a healthy dose of skepticism about the role religious ideas, identities, and practices might actually play in civil wars. I hope this manuscript leaves him nodding and shaking his head in equal measure.

Ann Swidler also provided a number of comments that stuck with me since my initial defense. And, she has continued to provide support and advice that goes well beyond her role as the outside member of my committee. While our meetings have been limited over the years, each conversation left me with pages full of notes that took weeks, and sometimes months, to think through properly. I am humbled by her intellectual vision and commitment to this project. Her detailed and critical feedback made this a better dissertation.

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delight and intellectual curiosity to my work. He drove me to pursue interesting, rather than trendy, research topics. And, he gave me the courage to look in the direction no one else was bothering to consider. This includes caring deeply about teaching.

Most importantly, Ron is friend. It is the hours spent talking and laughing over meals that I will miss most. I cannot quite pin down the moment when Ron became more than an advisor, but it has made all the difference. Ron welcomed me figuratively and literally into his family. He provided a home in Berkeley and Herzliya. He invited me to holiday celebrations. He included me on excursions that crisscrossed the Bay Area and Israel. He suggested we grab a coffee at the exact moment I felt at my lowest. Ron made research and life in Berkeley and beyond a communal, joyful, and enlivening experience. I can only hope my company provided a mere fraction of the same for him.

My committee has, of course, been just one part of the larger crucible of relationships that defined my time at Berkeley. I remain deeply indebted to all of my colleagues that offered comments on previous versions of this project, lent a sympathetic ear over drinks or a ride through the Berkeley hills, or shared hotel rooms to make conference travel more affordable.

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My entry into the burgeoning study of religion and conflict benefited similarly from the kind stewardship of the small, but ever growing, group of scholars engaged in that subfield. This includes the Religion and International Relations Section of the International Studies Association, the Religion and Politics Section of the American Political Science Association, and the Institute for the Study of Religion, Economics, and Society at Chapman University. Through these and other organizations, I have enjoyed the mentorship and solidarity of junior and senior scholars determined to “bring religion back in” to our scholarship. Of particular support have been David Buckley, Jonathan Fox, Peter Henne, Tony Gill, Daniel Philpott, Nukhet Sandal, Isak Svensson, Monica Toft, Ken Wald, and Carolyn Warner. Despite their many other obligations, they never hesitated to reply to a message, meet at a conference, or draw my attention to an opportunity that might advance this study. I am indebted to their kind spirit and deep commitment to advancing the field.

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California, I have further benefited from the amity of several friends with whom I served in Peace Corps. Maria Acosta, Kelly Clancy, Kennon Lee, Daniel Sheridan, and Jennifer Shin made the Bay a home, rather than merely a place to study.

As this is a dissertation on religion, it is fitting to close with an acknowledgment of three faith communities that have further shaped this work. The first is the itinerant and interfaith community at Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Chania, Crete. While another island in the Mediterranean became a focus of my scholarship, it was on the Great Island that I first began to think seriously about the ambivalence of the sacred. The long conversations spent under the olive tree in Etz Hayyim's courtyard challenged me to think more deeply about my faith tradition, as well as provided the space to come into deeper relationship with other communities.

The Benedictine charism provided an unexpected influence during my time in California. This was encountered, initially, through the hospitality and stillness of the New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur. It is there that I sat with a number of the difficult questions raised in this study, drafted early versions of several chapters, and embraced the great silence amidst the cashmere hills filled with evergreens.

During the final writing stage of the project, I also stumbled upon the writings of St. Hildegard of Bingen. The rediscovery of her 11<sup>th</sup> century compositions in the late 1970s (along with her theological, scientific, and prophetic writings) has made her a well-known name in classical music circles, especially admirers of the medieval period. For me, it was her reluctance for many years to put pen to paper that presented a kindred spirit. All dissertations take time to form into a written product, but mine perhaps longer than the average one. That reluctance was not due to laziness or stubbornness. Rather, it was "an exercise in humility" brought on by "doubt and bad opinion and the diversity of human words". Hildegard's struggle, along with one of her visions in which she was admonished to "Cry out therefore, and write thus", must make her the patron saint of dissertation writers.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, I would never have considered studying religion in the first place were it not for my time as an undergraduate at the University of Notre Dame. The men and women of Holy Cross – especially David B. Burrell, CSC and Mary Louise Gude, CSC – instilled in me a deep appreciation for and curiosity about spiritual traditions. They also taught me that faith could be a way of asking and pursuing questions in community. I pray those who have passed this way before me deem this dissertation a worthy contribution. And, that despite the study's limitations, which remain entirely my own, it will help those who come after tread a bit more easily.

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<sup>1</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, First Edition (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 60-61.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### **1.1. Motivating Puzzle**

Nothing seemed to go as planned in the capital of Cyprus on the night of February 29, 1956. British colonial officials ostensibly gathered with the leader of the Greek Cypriot community, Archbishop Makarios III, to conclude a peace deal that would end eleven months of armed opposition to their rule of the island. While these bureaucrats hammered out the final details of a negotiated settlement in the sandstone halls of Government House, insurgent forces exploded 21 bombs across Nicosia.<sup>1</sup> British reaction was livid and the talks immediately abandoned. Soon thereafter, Makarios was deported and a radio broadcast from then-Governor John Harding announced that the Archbishop's absence would pave the way for "moderate politicians to come forward" and help end the conflict.<sup>2</sup>

It is tempting to conclude from the above description that blame for the failed peace talks lies with the Archbishop and the guerrilla organization he spearheaded, the *National Organisation of Cypriot Struggle* (EOKA).<sup>3</sup> In truth, the British never expected to reach a political settlement. The previous day, Secretary of State for the Colonies Sir Alan Lennox-Boyd informed Prime Minister Anthony Eden that he saw no possibility of Makarios compromising.<sup>4</sup> He only planned to attend the meeting so that the British could later say they did everything possible to reach an agreement and, thus, win global support for their continued control of the island.

This chain of events in Cyprus flips a strongly held conventional wisdom that insurgents' beliefs and identities alone drive religious civil wars to endure longer and remain more resistant to bargained solutions than other types of armed conflicts. Such a view is now commonplace among scholars, policymakers, and journalists.

Studies pointing to the preternatural resolve and rigidity of religiously-motivated insurgent groups have, unsurprisingly, proliferated since September 11, 2001.<sup>5</sup> Confessional beliefs, it is argued, increase the resolve of dissidents and the subjective value of their demands. Compromise becomes less likely because rebels can absorb more costs and their demands cannot be easily divided or substituted.

Policymakers, in turn, frequently bemoan the obstinacy of religious opponents in contemporary conflicts – from ISIS and other Islamist groups in the Middle East to rebels with

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<sup>1</sup> David French, *Fighting EOKA: The British Counter-Insurgency Campaign on Cyprus, 1955-1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 103.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 119.

<sup>3</sup> This is a standard translation of the organization's full name, which in Greek was Εθνική Οργάνωσις Κυπρίων Αγωνιστών.

<sup>4</sup> The National Archives (TNA) CO 926/549: Colonial Secretary to Eden, 28 Feb 1956.

<sup>5</sup> The debate surrounding Samuel P. Huntington's *clash of civilizations thesis* in the mid-1990s drove an initial uptick of interest in the study of religious violence. However, it was the events of 9/11 that led to an unprecedented spike in studies on the topic in political science. For a review of this growth in both demand and supply, see Ron E. Hassner, "Religion and International Affairs: The State of the Art," in *Religion, Identity and Global Governance: Ideas, Evidence and Practice*, eds. Steven Lamy and Patrick James (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 37–56 and Jeffrey Haynes, "Religion and International Relations after '9/11,'" *Democratization* 12, no. 3 (June 1, 2005): 398–413. See also Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

explicit Christian demands, such as the Lord's Resistance Army in East Africa or the National Liberation Front of Tripura in eastern India, to Buddhist-nationalists like the Arakan Army in Myanmar.<sup>6</sup> One ten-year U.S. State Department veteran summarized the problem of the increasingly central role of religion in the Syrian civil war as follows, "People hold onto religious fights longer than battles over land and water. It becomes existential and related to belief in a higher calling."<sup>7</sup>

Seldom do we consider the inverse: that state intransigence may also be a reason religious conflicts endure so long. Yet, the opening anecdote to this study precisely captures this dynamic. For the majority of the conflict, British security forces appeared willing to fight for as long as it took to restore order on the island. They construed Makarios as inflexible and EOKA as a fanatical movement that needed to be crushed if there was to be any hope for a lasting peace. The religious dynamics of the insurgency - including initiation oaths, a cult of martyrs, charismatic religious leadership, and considerable support from the Orthodox Church – were regularly referenced when assessing the threat posed by Cypriot insurgents.

In contrast, the leaders of EOKA, including the Archbishop who was known among his conferees as a shrewd politician and negotiator, saw violence as an effective tool for pressuring the British to make concessions.<sup>8</sup> Cypriot insurgents believed that a prolonged conflict would weaken British resolve and gain international attention to and sympathy for their cause. And, they eventually compromised on their goals, accepting independence for Cyprus rather than union with Greece through the London and Zurich Agreements of 1959.

British response in Cyprus during the early postwar period may be particularly dramatic, but it is hardly unique. A wide range of governments have either spurned or undermined negotiation efforts with religious opponents over the past half century. Ferdinand Marcos, for instance, reneged on the 1976 Tripoli Agreement between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which fought for a Bangsamoro homeland in which Islamic laws and customs could be freely practiced. Rather than let MNLF leaders govern the South as originally agreed, Marcos created his own regional government and handpicked its leadership in the Muslim majority area of Mindanao.<sup>9</sup>

The Egyptian government similarly found little use for negotiations with Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya during the 1990s, opting instead for violent repression of the opposition group.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the Algerian government refused to meet with armed organizations during that country's brutal civil war in the 1990s. While some Islamist groups made considerable concessions at talks in Rome brokered by the Catholic faith-based organization Saint'Egidio,

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<sup>6</sup> For a summary of policymakers' concerns about religious violence, see Monica Duffy Toft, "Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War," *International Security* 31, no. 4 (2007): 97–131. Examples of these anxieties are well illustrated in Daniel Byman, "The State of Terror," *Slate*, June 13, 2014; Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic*, March 2015.

<sup>7</sup> As cited in Daniel Burke, "Syria Explained: How It Became a Religious War," September 4, 2013, <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/09/04/syrian-wars-got-religion-and-that-aint-good/>.

<sup>8</sup> Sia Anagnostopoulou, "Makarios III, 1950-77: Creating the Ethnarchic State," in *The Archbishops of Cyprus in the Modern Age: The Changing Role of the Archbishop-Ethnarch, Their Identities and Politics*, ed. Michalis N. Michael and Andrekos Varnava (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 240–92.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Blaydes and Lawrence Rubin, "Ideological Reorientation and Counterterrorism: Confronting Militant Islam in Egypt," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 4 (2008): 461–79; Associated Press, "Egyptian Government Reiterates No Talks With Islamic Extremists," February 10, 1998.

Algerian leaders declined to attend the peace talks or accept the proposed settlement.<sup>11</sup> More recently, Afghan officials have snubbed overtures by the Taliban to begin negotiations through an office established in Qatar.<sup>12</sup>

These examples paint a more complicated relationship between religion and conflict intractability than is otherwise suggested by popular commentary and the extant scholarship. We have become accustomed to the idea that rebels are solely responsible for the protracted nature of religious conflicts. However, as the above cases demonstrate, insurgent forces are never the only actors that decide whether to reach a bargained solution or continue fighting. Nor are they the only ones to be influenced by the religious dynamics of conflict.<sup>13</sup> Looking at only one side of the battlefield oversimplifies the problem.

This study seeks to correct for this bias by taking the literature on religion and conflict in a new direction. My central focus is on why and when government, not insurgent, forces serve as a critical barrier to religious conflict settlement. I draw on insights from social psychology, along with religious and strategic studies, to develop a novel theoretical framework for understanding the strategic preferences of states for religious conflict termination. My theory explains how political elites think about the nature of and threat posed by religious violence, how these interpretations influence strategic preferences and constrain policy choices, and the conditions under which the religious nature of insurgents will most influence counterinsurgent decision making processes. In addition, I provide comparative evidence from British counterinsurgency campaigns during the early postwar period to illustrate the usefulness of my claims.

What I hope to highlight in this study is that the current consensus for religious conflict intractability paints only part of the picture. The rush to comprehend insurgents' seemingly irrational motivations has been at the expense of better understanding what drives a more traditional set of decision makers. If we are to understand why religious civil wars are so difficult to resolve peacefully we need to appreciate the preferences and motivations of all the actors involved. The remainder of this introductory chapter summarizes the extant scholarship and its limitations, previews my theoretical framework, and elaborates on the research design, objectives, and overall plan of the study.

## 1.2 Existing Explanations for Religious Conflict Intractability

Protracted conflicts have occupied a central focus in political science research for at least three decades. With the spike in civil conflicts following the end of the Cold War, analysts turned their attention to explaining both the causes of this new wave of political violence and the barriers to their peaceful settlement. Only since September 11, 2001, however, have scholars in the social sciences paid serious attention to the ways that religious identities, beliefs, and practices complicate the peaceful resolution of armed struggles. The burgeoning field of religious conflict identifies two main pathways through which religion might make armed

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<sup>11</sup> Luis Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War, 1990-1998* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 116 - 117.

<sup>12</sup> Rob Crilly, "Hamid Karzai Plunges Taliban Peace Talks into Doubt," *The Telegraph*, June 19, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Modern militaries are often portrayed as secular institutions; however, numerous studies have illustrated the subtle influence of religious beliefs, practices, and symbols on professional soldiers. See Ron E. Hassner, *Religion on the Battlefield* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Ron E. Hassner, ed., *Religion in the Military Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Anne Loveland, *Change and Conflict in the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps since 1945* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2014); Doris L. Bergen, ed., *Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

conflicts more intractable. In brief, religion can provide rebels the means or the motivation for continuing a struggle longer than they otherwise might.

In this section, I review the two approaches developed in the religious conflict literature, summarize three more traditional explanations for civil war conflict termination patterns, and clarify why these arguments remain incomplete for explaining the puzzle of religious conflict intractability. In the following section, I preview my alternative argument that draws attention to the unwillingness of state, not insurgent, forces to reach a bargained solution during religious civil wars.

### ***1.2.1 The Organizational Advantages of Religious Insurgent Groups***

The first approach commonly proposed in the religious conflict literature emphasizes what it claims to be important organizational advantages provided by spiritual (especially extremist) beliefs and practices. These benefits can, for example, help rebel leaders overcome traditional principal-agent problems by screening out less committed soldiers.<sup>14</sup> Many religious rebels that draw on extremist ideologies require high personal sacrifice for membership, such as renouncing friends and family that do not share the same beliefs. These groups are also inclined to appeal to ideologues in the population that have more to gain from fighting. Moreover, religious groups might have an additional advantage when it comes to screening potential recruits given their large social networks.<sup>15</sup>

Once members join, religious ideas and practices can further align principal and agent preferences in a number of ways. For instance, a sense of moral supremacy might align leader and insurgent interests and make combatants less likely to question the legitimacy of their cause, even in the face of significant setbacks.<sup>16</sup> Proponents of this approach also suggest that strong religious (and ethnic) bonds inhibit the success of contentious mobilization appeals within the group. They argue, for instance, that groups with shared religious identities experience stronger attachments because they provide a convenient focus for political entrepreneurs seeking to emphasize group unity.<sup>17</sup>

The incorporation of religious rituals can also be a particularly powerful set of tools for inculcating beliefs and internalizing a movement's cause.<sup>18</sup> Ideological indoctrination is, of

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<sup>14</sup> Eli Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011); Eli Berman and David D. Laitin, "Religion, Terrorism and Public Goods: Testing the Club Model," *Journal of Public Economics* 92, no. 10 (2008): 1942–67; Rodney Stark, "Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 11, no. 2 (1996): 133–46.

<sup>15</sup> Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, "Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects," *American Journal of Sociology* 85 (1980): 1376–95.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Shultz and Andrea J. Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias: The Warriors of Contemporary Combat* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> T. Warren and K. Troy, "The Logic of Intra-Ethnic Conflict: Group Fragmentation in the Shadow of State Power," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 3 (2014); Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic books, 1973), 105–57.

<sup>18</sup> Dominic Johnson, "Gods of War: The Adaptive Logic of Religious Conflict," in *The Evolution of Religion: Studies, Theories, and Critiques*, eds. Joseph Bulbulia et al. (Santa Margarita, CA: Collins Foundation Press, 2008), 111–17; Roos Haer, Lilli Banholzer, and Verena Ertl, "Create Compliance and Cohesion: How Rebel Organizations Manage to Survive," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22, no. 3 (2011): 415–34; Emil Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev, *The Individual Disengagement of Avengers, Nationalists, and Jihadists: Why Ex-Militants Choose to Abandon*



course, not unique to religious rebel movements. However, this approach points out ways that religious practices can be particularly well suited to such a task.

Religious ideas and identities might also offer inexpensive, but evocative, rewards and punishments to maintain membership over time. Traditionally, rebel leaders persuade their members to incur the high costs of fighting, especially in the face of setbacks, through private, material rewards. But religious groups have a range of other options, such as deferred compensation in the form of an eternal afterlife or rewards in paradise. Scott Gates and Ragnhild Nordås point specifically to the role of spiritual authority in promoting and maintaining group cohesion. They argue that religiously motivated rebel groups have less need for direct surveillance because members see the leader as representing or incarnating the divine, who always keeps the flock under scrutiny. Accordingly, the perceived probability of reprimand for disobeying or defecting from a cause (and the group that represents the cause) is likely to be substantially higher in groups that trust retribution is in the hands of God than in movements where punishment is managed by a worldly source.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, this approach asserts that many religions also include dictates that rebel leaders can use to discourage desertion. Most notably, Eli Berman maintains that radical religious groups are particularly good at limiting defections because they require high personal sacrifice, provide essential social services, and cut members off from alternative social networks.<sup>20</sup> Salafi jihadists, for example, have invoked Islam's principle of takfir as license to kill dissenters and defectors of their movement. Furthermore, the threat of a potentially devastating type of personal punishment is not only costless to enforce, but also impossible to escape.<sup>21</sup>

The means mechanism, to summarize, points to distinct organizational advantages enjoyed by rebel groups that draw on religious ideologies and practices. Shared commitments and incentives drive members that join such groups to remain loyal and dedicated to the organization over time. It predicts that religious conflicts are likely to remain intractable because of the control leaders have over their members and the resiliency of these groups.

### ***1.2.2 The Motivations of Religious Insurgent Groups***

A second approach for understanding religious conflict intractability emphasizes that insurgents in these disputes typically fight for intangible benefits, which forecloses negotiation. Classic bargaining models of warfare envision rational actors that make decisions about the value of continued fighting versus a negotiated peace based on tangible costs and benefits. Religious adherents complicate this model, it is argued, because they pursue goals that either cannot be shared in this world or only fully realized in the next. This motivates them to continue their struggle longer than they otherwise might.

Many religious conflicts, for instance, are fought over indivisible issues. These are objectives that cannot be easily divided or substituted without losing their subjective value. Sacred space is the most common example.<sup>22</sup> It represents a unique link between the believer and

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*Violence in the North Caucasus* (New York: Palgrave, 2014); John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (Routledge, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Scott Gates and Ragnhild Nordås, "Recruitment, Retention, and Religion in Rebel Groups," *Simons Papers in Security Development* 32 (2014).

<sup>20</sup> Berman, *Radical, Religious, and Violent*; Berman and Laitin, "Religion, Terrorism and Public Goods."

<sup>21</sup> Barbara F. Walter, "The Extremist's Advantage in Civil Wars," *International Security* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 7–39.

<sup>22</sup> Ron E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Ron E. Hassner, "To Halve and to Hold: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility," *Security Studies* 12, no. 4 (2003):

the supernatural. This core function transforms and reinforces sacred sites as places set apart from and contrasted with the profane. Consequently, any act that blurs this distinction is an act of desecration and diminishes the value of the resource. In addition, sacred sites are not easily replaced because they represent distinct moments in a faith community's history that cannot be found elsewhere or reproduced. Larger territorial units, including entire regions of a state or the state itself, can also take on these properties, especially when a "homeland" becomes an integral attribute of a group's identity.<sup>23</sup>

Indivisible issues can also refer to more than territory. Conflicts for control of the country, including its legal system, might also take on these subjective values. For instance, there is only one constitution in a state, which can either be secular or religious, but not both simultaneously.<sup>24</sup> Typical ways to deal with indivisibility, such as side payments, are less helpful for these issues because religious rebels see any compromise between spiritual and political matters as capitulation to a secularist point of view.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, there is a high audience cost to insurgent leaders that try to negotiate on religious ideas they may have once fueled.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to indivisibility, religious rebels might be less likely to make concessions during civil wars because they enjoy longer time horizons than their secular counterparts. This approach argues that adherents of a faith tradition do not fear death because of beliefs in the afterlife.<sup>27</sup> Rather, it is to be welcomed as a reward for a life well lived or a sacred duty performed.

These ideas, ultimately, increase the willingness of religious insurgents to forgo material gains in the present for spiritual rewards in the future. They are able to absorb more costs during a conflict and, consequently, make fewer concessions, even in the face of significant setbacks or diminishing economic returns.<sup>28</sup> Discounting present costs for future benefits is, for instance, one reason often cited for why the Crusaders continued their campaigns long after the material costs exceeded the benefits.<sup>29</sup> Jessica Stern presents a similar argument for contemporary suicide bombing campaigns. She argues that religious extremist groups, such as Hamas, train their attackers to value the expected benefits of an eternal life over those of the present.<sup>30</sup>

Religious rebels with longer time horizons than secular combatants might also be willing to take higher risks and be less likely to be deterred from or by actions that cause physical harm. During the Beslan school siege in September of 2004, for example, Chechen and foreign fighters

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1–33; Stacie E. Goddard, "Uncommon Ground: Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy," *International Organization* 60, no. 01 (2006): 35–68.

<sup>23</sup> Monica Duffy Toft, "Issue Indivisibility and Time Horizons as Rationalist Explanations for War," *Security Studies* 15, no. 1 (2006): 34–69. See also Goddard, "Uncommon Ground."

<sup>24</sup> Isak Svensson, "Fighting with Faith: Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 6 (2007): 930–49; Isak Svensson, *Ending Holy Wars: Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars* (Brisbane, Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Isak Svensson and Emily Harding, "How Holy Wars End: Exploring the Termination Patterns of Conflicts with Religious Dimensions in Asia," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 2 (2011): 133–49.

<sup>27</sup> Toft, "Issue Indivisibility and Time Horizons as Rationalist Explanations for War."

<sup>28</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer similarly notes that religious fundamentalists often view a conflict in terms of sacred or divine time, which reduces their willingness to compromise their goals in the short term. See Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*.

<sup>29</sup> Michael C. Horowitz, "Long Time Going: Religion and the Duration of Crusading," *International Security* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 162–93.

<sup>30</sup> Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2004), 51.

in the North Caucasus made several statements about their preparedness to die and their expected reward of eternal paradise for such self-sacrifice.<sup>31</sup>

The motivations mechanism, in sum, suggests that the bargaining range of belligerents is significantly minimized when rebels frame and perceive their claims in religious terms.<sup>32</sup> The increased, subjective value of territory or other goals makes compromise less likely. And, longer time horizons shift individual-level calculations about the utility gained from continued fighting versus surrender. This approach predicts conflicts will endure because the benefits for rebels of continued fighting outweigh those of peace.

### ***1.2.3 Alternative Explanations for Conflict Intractability***

The broader literature on conflict termination offers a wide range of alternative mechanisms that might obstruct the peaceful resolution of civil wars. Three, in particular, are worth mentioning given their prominence in the discipline and potential applicability to religious conflicts.

The first, and most oft-cited, obstacle to negotiated settlements in civil wars is the commitment problem. Explanations that emphasize this mechanism discount the influence of identity and indivisibility. Instead, they highlight that credible guarantees on the terms of a settlement are the critical condition for combatants to agree to stop fighting and put down their weapons.<sup>33</sup>

Drawing on rationalist insights, this approach argues that credible peace deals are almost impossible to arrange by the combatants themselves during civil wars. Both sides have an incentive to renege on the deal given the consequences of one side not honoring the commitment to stop fighting. Since bargains cannot be enforced by the conflict parties and both sides have strong incentives to remain armed, negotiated settlements are likely to succeed only in those cases where a third party steps in to guarantee the terms of the commitment. As summarized by Barbara Walter, one of the foremost proponents of this explanation, “Only when an outside enforcer steps in to guarantee the terms do commitments to disarm and share political power become believable. Only then does cooperation become possible.”<sup>34</sup> Security guarantees brokered by a foreign power, according to this approach, are the surest way to achieve a negotiated settlement in civil war. In their absence, fighting is likely to continue.

A second explanation for the protracted nature of civil wars, in general, looks at a different aspect of foreign influence. It contends that international involvement, especially foreign interventions made decisively for one side, lead to longer and bloodier conflicts.<sup>35</sup> This is because external interventions reshape the balance of power between government and insurgent

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<sup>31</sup> Toft, “Issue Indivisibility and Time Horizons as Rationalist Explanations for War.”

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Fox, “The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945–2001,” *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 6 (2004): 715–31.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara F. Walter, “Bargaining Failures and Civil War,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 243–61; Barbara F. Walter, “The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement,” *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 335–64; James D. Fearon, “Why Do Some Civil Wars Last so Much Longer than Others?,” *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): 275–301.

<sup>34</sup> Walter, “The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement,” 336.

<sup>35</sup> Dylan Balch-Lindsay and Andrew J. Enterline, “Killing Time: The World Politics of Civil War Duration, 1820–1992,” *International Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2000): 615–42; Reed M Wood, Jacob D Kathman, and Stephen E Gent, “Armed Intervention and Civilian Victimization in Intrastate Conflicts,” *Journal of Peace Research* 49, no. 5 (2012): 647–60.

forces. An influx in resources can increase both the capabilities and resolve of combatants.<sup>36</sup> This enables one or both sides to continue fighting longer than they otherwise might and often leads to stalemates.<sup>37</sup> For example, the extensive foreign assistance flowing into the on-going Syrian civil war is one reason both government and insurgents troops have no interest in coming to the bargaining table. The former receives substantial aid from Russia and Iran, while various insurgent groups are funded by Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states.

A third obstacle to the peaceful resolution of civil wars is the number of factions in any given conflict. The more groups that are competing for power, the more difficult it can be to reach a settlement to which all parties consent.<sup>38</sup> This is because the set of agreements that all actors prefer to conflict are fewer than if there were just two combat parties. In addition, it becomes increasingly difficult to assess the relative balance of power across actors as the number of competing factions grows. Finally, each group has an incentive to hold out for the best deal possible. Thus, the more factions in a conflict, the more likely it is that some will serve as spoilers that undermine a particular peace agreement in the hope that they can achieve a better settlement later.<sup>39</sup>

To summarize, commitment problems, foreign entanglements, and the number of factions involved in a conflict can all contribute to the protracted nature of civil wars. These mechanisms have been proposed to explain a general set of cases. If they are more prevalent in religious civil wars than other types of armed violence, they might explain the dearth of peace settlements in that type of armed violence. However, as I discuss below, there are good reasons to remain skeptical that this is the case.

### ***1.2.4 The Limitations of Existing Explanations***

Existing theories for the protracted nature of religious civil wars are useful, but incomplete for three primary reasons. First, the explanations for conflict intractability prominent in the general civil war literature are not well suited for understanding the anomaly presented by religious conflict intractability. As mentioned above, those theories do not claim that the processes they identify are unique to internal wars fought along confessional lines or for spiritual objectives. Nor is there empirical evidence to suggest that commitment problems, foreign intervention, or veto players are more likely in religious than non-religious conflicts. These

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<sup>36</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas and Laia Balcells, "International System and Technologies of Rebellion: How the End of the Cold War Shaped Internal Conflict," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 03 (2010): 415–29.

<sup>37</sup> External intervention can also lead groups that receive foreign assistance to kill more civilians as they become less reliant on support from local populations. See Bethany Lacina, "Explaining the Severity of Civil Wars," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 2 (2006): 276–89; Patrick M. Regan, "Third-Party Interventions and the Duration of Intrastate Conflicts," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (2002): 55–73; Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*.

<sup>38</sup> David E. Cunningham, "Veto Players and Civil War Duration," *American Journal of Political Science* 50, no. 4 (2006): 875–92; Wendy Pearlman and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Nonstate Actors, Fragmentation, and Conflict Processes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 1 (2012): 3–15; Kristin M. Bakke, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, and Lee J. M. Seymour, "A Plague of Initials: Fragmentation, Cohesion, and Infighting in Civil Wars," *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 2 (2012): 265–83. Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "Divide and Conquer or Divide and Concede: How Do States Respond to Internally Divided Separatists?," *The American Political Science Review* 105, no. 2 (2011): 275–97.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew G. Reiter, "Does Spoiling Work? Assessing the Impact of Spoilers on Civil War Peace Agreements," *Civil Wars* 17, no. 1 (2015): 89–111; Kelly M. Greenhill and Solomon Major, "The Perils of Profiling: Civil War Spoilers and the Collapse of Intrastate Peace Accords," *International Security* 31, no. 3 (2007): 7–40; Stephen John Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes," *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 5–53.

explanations, therefore, have limited analytic leverage for understanding the variation that other studies observe between the two types of civil wars since the purported mechanisms may be present in both environments. Those processes might contribute to the protracted nature of religious conflicts, and I try to demonstrate where this is the case in the conflicts I investigate in this study. However, they do not appear to be the primary reason religious disputes remain so difficult to resolve peacefully.

Second, theories that focus on the organizational advantage of religious insurgents suffer from at least two inference problems. One concerns their reliance on no-variance research designs. The majority of studies within this approach focus overwhelmingly on single case studies of religious groups, rather than comparisons between religious and secular organizations. Consequently, they cannot adequately evaluate whether religious insurgents necessarily fare better than their secular counterparts or whether their purported advantages apply only to groups that draw explicitly on religious traditions. Similar claims have been made about nationalist groups, but these are rarely compared to religious organizations in studies within this approach.<sup>40</sup>

Another concern for studies that emphasize the means mechanism is selection bias.<sup>41</sup> Since most analysts focus on a narrow range of established insurgent groups, it remains unclear whether the organizational traits they identify contribute to intractability or can be found in both religious groups that maintain the allegiance of their members and those that experience ample infighting, internal divisions, and defeat. If it is the latter, there are a set of cases that have yet to be identified that feature religious groups with similar organizational traits that do not fight in intractable conflicts.

Third, and most importantly, we should remain skeptical of existing explanations for religious conflict intractability because these studies lack empirical evidence to support their proposed mechanisms. This is particularly true for the approach that emphasizes insurgent motivations. Studies on the role of indivisibility or time horizons in religious conflicts rely heavily on cross-national, quantitative analyses to demonstrate a correlational relationship. These point to a well-defined link between religion and conflict intractability. The mechanism to explain this relationship, however, is often asserted, but rarely tested. Indeed, some analysts explicitly acknowledge that they cannot discriminate between competing causal pathways in their research design.<sup>42</sup>

To summarize, the broad civil war literature considers the motivations of actors on both sides of the battlefield, but it does not offer a theory for why religious conflicts, specifically, are so difficult to resolve through a bargained solution. The religious conflict literature provides such explanations, but their focus remains one-sided. In addition, studies that focus on the means and motivations of religious insurgents either fail to directly test for the mechanisms claimed to link rebel beliefs to conflict intractability or they employ research designs that restrict the causal inferences we can draw. These limitations highlight the need for additional study of the link between religion and conflict intractability.

### 1.3 The Argument

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<sup>40</sup> See Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (January 1975): 175–200.

<sup>41</sup> Barbara Geddes, "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics," *Political Analysis* 2, no. 1 (1990): 131–50.

<sup>42</sup> Svensson, "Fighting with Faith," 943.

In contrast to existing approaches, I draw attention to the role government, not rebel, forces play in obstructing the peaceful resolution of religious civil wars. Drawing on insights from social psychology, along with the strategic and religious studies literatures, I advance a three-part framework for why and when counterinsurgent officials will refuse to compromise with opposition movements they construe as religious. My argument connects to a small, but growing, cohort of scholars interested in how the religious characteristics of dissenters affect state response. These analyses often focus on the observed threat religious groups pose to political elites.<sup>43</sup> I, instead, draw attention to how attitudes about religious violence, regardless of its real-world consequences, can explain the reluctance of states to bargain with religious rebels. Perceptions of religious violence are enough to drive a strategic preference away from negotiation and towards repression.<sup>44</sup>

The starting point of my argument is that Western political and military elites perceive religious insurgents differently than other violent non-state actors. This assertion derives from a simple insight grounded in the social psychology literature: religious violence has extremely high correspondence for decision makers. By this I mean that government officials directly infer the motives of religious, but not necessarily other, insurgents from their behavior, rather than situational factors. They see religious groups as motivated by internal convictions to overthrow the status quo, not fighting to protest unfavorable conditions, such as poverty or territorial occupation. I argue this view is driven by a cognitive heuristic – known as *correspondence bias* – embedded in the strategic cultures of most modern, Western security communities.

Correspondence bias increases the perceived congruence between observed behavior and inferred motive, but it does not apply to all actions equally. Rather, three factors in particular drive an actor to presume the objectives of another are embedded in their behavior: intentionality, adherence to social norms, and the target of inflicted harm. An action is determined to have high correspondence when it is seen to be freely chosen, deviates from societal expectations, and causes personal harm to the perceiver. Activities that are imposed on others, in line with social norms, and do not lead to individual harm have low correspondence. These latter actions may be attributed to situational factors, while the former are understood to be driven by personal traits.

Religious violence adheres especially well to the three conditions for high correspondence due to prevailing social and cultural secular biases. The steady institutional differentiation between church and state initiated with the Peace of Westphalia has birthed and reinforced a persistent and pervasive assumption that religion is an individual, belief-oriented

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<sup>43</sup> Cullen S. Hendrix and Idean Salehyan, “A House Divided Threat Perception, Military Factionalism, and Repression in Africa,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2016, 0022002715620473; Nukhet Sandal and Jonathan Fox, *Religion in International Relations Theory: Interactions and Possibilities* (New York: Routledge, 2013). Ani Sarkissian, *The Varieties of Religious Repression: Why Governments Restrict Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Peter S. Henne and Jason Klocek, “Taming the Gods: How Religious Conflict Shapes State Repression,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, September 27, 2017, Advanced Online Publication <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002717728104>; Toft, “Getting Religion?”

<sup>44</sup> My argument is also in line with social movement scholars who have persuasively shown that the identity of dissenters can substantially affect the type and extent of force applied by governments. The primary focus of this scholarship, particularly in recent years, has been the racial identity of protestors. See Christian Davenport, Sarah A. Soule, and David A. Armstrong, “Protesting While Black? The Differential Policing of American Activism, 1960 to 1990,” *American Sociological Review* 76, no. 1 (2011): 152–78; Sarah Soule and Christian Davenport, “Velvet Glove, Iron Fist, or Even Hand? Protest Policing in the United States, 1960-1990,” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (2009): 1–22.

activity that must be tamed (i.e., shielded from the public sphere) by the state in order to preserve social harmony. Religious studies scholars refer to this as the “myth of religious violence.”<sup>45</sup> It has proven to be an extraordinarily tenacious story in Western culture, and I argue that these societal values motivate and underpin the correspondence bias of national security communities. But, how precisely does this shared view influence Western states’ strategic preferences and choices towards religious conflict settlement?

The second part of my argument outlines how strategic culture serves as a lens that both gives meaning to the threats that governments face and frames choices about how to respond. Strategic culture is an *intervening*, not independent, variable that shapes the way political and military elites understand the intentions of religious insurgents and which strategic options are the most efficacious for dealing with such threats. They draw on these pervasive and enduring beliefs, assumptions, and habits of behavior regarding military force – including correspondence bias – to understand threats and determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives.

According to this view, the actual aim of an insurgent group is not important. What matters is whether political authorities determine a group to be religious. I hold that political authorities see a clear distinction between religion and other ideologies, such as Communism and nationalism, due to the above-mentioned “myth of religious” violence. This is primarily because the contemporary religious-secular distinction is now part of the legitimating conceptual apparatus of Western political authority.<sup>46</sup> The state exists, in part, to tame religious impulses and promote nationalist ones.

Once an insurgent organization is construed as religious, correspondence bias leads military and political elites to fixate on the actions, rather than the rhetoric of the group. In particular, they focus on the short-term consequences of their opponent’s attacks. This means that officials take more notice of the death and destruction of an assault by religious insurgents than on what an attack might be trying to accomplish in the long term. As a consequence, government officials construe religious insurgents as especially aggressive and uncompromising, even if this is not actually the case. They also infer that they have a maximalist objective to radically alter the status quo, rather than more moderate aims at territory, for example.

The inferences that religious insurgents seek to radically alter social values and structures severely restrict which policy options appear most efficacious for combatting them. Theoretically, the state has a broad repertoire of tools with which to respond to dissent.<sup>47</sup> However, once rebels are construed as religious, they are seen as less likely to be persuaded by incentives that will allow them to only partially achieve their objectives. Religious rebels, it is believed, will not bargain nor change their behavior based on increased hardships on the battlefield. Consequently, government officials discount the efficacy of a negotiated settlement. It is not that religious insurgents are necessarily unwilling to make concessions, therefore; it is that they cannot credibly do so due to how state decision makers interpret their motives.

The third part of my argument clarifies when correspondence bias should be most influential in the decision making process. Of course, decision makers weigh all sorts of factors

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<sup>45</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>47</sup> Christian Davenport, “State Repression and Political Order,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (2007): 1–23; Christian Davenport and Molly Inman, “The State of State Repression Research since the 1990s,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 4 (2012): 619–34.

when making strategic calculations. And, even when cognitive biases are present, they do not always play a major role in determining outcomes. I identify two conditions for when we should expect correspondence bias to be most likely to influence decision makers' strategic preferences in religious civil wars.

The first concerns the saliency of religion in a conflict. Groups can draw on religious identities, beliefs, and practices to varying degrees in support of their cause. Some, for instance, make appeals to shared faith traditions, others recruit from religious schools, and still others fight for explicit religious goals. I posit that decision makers' correspondence bias will play a stronger role in evaluating and responding to insurgents the more central a role religion plays in a conflict. This is because religion becomes harder to ignore and it is believed that the group poses a greater threat to social and political structure under this condition. Holding with existing scholarship on religious violence, I contend that religion is more salient or central when combatants claim they are fighting for religious goals than when they merely organize along confessional lines.

The second factor that determines the influence of strategic culture during religious civil wars is the level of familiarity a counterinsurgent force has with the confessional community that insurgents represent. The frequency and closeness of past interactions is particularly important. The less experience a decision maker has with a problem, the more likely he or she is to draw on mental structures to simplify complexity and manage uncertainty.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, correspondence bias will be more strongly leveraged when government officials face off against a religious threat for which they have restricted knowledge and limited previous contact.

To summarize, the theoretical framework that I advance in this study explains why and when state, rather than insurgent, forces are responsible for the intractability of religious civil wars. Ultimately, religious violence obscures a group's policy objectives and militates against compromise. Governments do not believe religious insurgents fight to protest unfavorable conditions; rather, they infer religious insurgents seek to overturn the status quo from their behavior. This decision making process is shaped by a secular strategic culture that heightens the correspondence between religious insurgents behavior and motives. And, it is most influential when religious demands represent a central incompatibility in the conflict and counterinsurgents face an unfamiliar faith tradition. Under these conditions, government officials infer that religious insurgents have maximalist objectives, even when this is not the case. And, they discount the efficacy of a negotiated settlement for resolving these conflicts.

Before outlining how I test these claims empirically, two points of clarification are worth noting. First, and foremost, it is important to emphasize that this study is an analysis of the strategic preferences of counterinsurgent forces during religious civil wars. I seek to understand why government and military elites favor certain policy options over others when combatting religious insurgents. I am not evaluating the implementation of a particular policy choice – neither its ultimate selection nor its effectiveness.

Strategic preferences often do align with strategic choice, but not always. There are many factors that can contribute to the selection and implementation of a particular policy. What I aim to capture is the dominant strategic preference of Western security communities for how to respond to religious opposition. Strategic culture, specifically correspondence bias, is one important factor that limits the range of choices considered. Decision makers may not always act

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<sup>48</sup> Alex Mintz, "How Do Leaders Make Decisions? A Poliheuristic Perspective," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 1 (2004): 3–13; Janice Gross Stein, "Threat Perception in International Relations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, ed. Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).



on these preferences due to external factors, but we can observe a general predilection for specific policy options against bargaining over others during religious conflict.

In addition, I do not claim that material factors, especially military capabilities and economic issues, are unimportant in shaping threat perceptions and counterinsurgency strategies. Rather, my framework aims to capture dynamics at play that may be overlooked using more conventional approaches. Most studies on counterinsurgency assume states have fixed interests and assess how varying capacity shapes outcomes.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, we still know relatively little about how government officials and counterinsurgent forces form their interests, in the first place. The approach I offer provides insight into the ways political and military decision makers define threats as religious, and how this understanding shapes strategic preferences.

## 1.4 Research Design

Scholars have primarily relied on cross-national, quantitative analyses to investigate the link between religion and conflict termination patterns. These studies have been valuable in identifying and framing the puzzle addressed in this study. However, as discussed above, they are less well suited for examining the causal mechanism(s) that link religion with fewer peace agreements.

Assessing my theory for the role state forces play in driving religious conflict intractability requires careful comparisons and detailed information about the decision making process in each case. We need to identify the ideas and images, or lack thereof, invoked by military planners, the process by which a consensus view, if any, emerges, and the impact of these interpretations on threat assessments and strategic preferences. To that end, I leverage a qualitative research design that includes cross-national and within-case comparisons of British counterinsurgency campaigns during the early post-war period.

### 1.4.1 Method

I provide comparative evidence from three British counterinsurgency campaigns during the early postwar period to illustrate the empirical utility of my theory. The first case is the uprising in Mandatory Palestine waged by secular (i.e., Haganah and Irgun) and religious (i.e., Lehi or Stern Gang) Jewish resistance groups. This stands out as one of the first post-war struggles for national liberation and culminated in the establishment of the State of Israel.<sup>50</sup> Because multiple groups fought against the British, the case offers the opportunity for a within-case comparison of British understanding and treatment of secular versus religious Zionist groups.

The second conflict I investigate took place a decade later and less than 500 kilometres across the Mediterranean Sea. From 1955 to 1959, the British faced a guerrilla group known as the *National Organisation of Cypriot Struggle* (EOKA). It was organized by Archbishop Makarios III and supported by the Orthodox Church of Cyprus. What is particularly intriguing

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<sup>49</sup> Paul Staniland, “States, Insurgents, and Wartime Political Orders,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 02 (June 2012): 243–64.

<sup>50</sup> For a detailed analysis of how the Jewish underground defeated the British and set in motion a chain of events that culminated in the creation of the State of Israel, see Bruce Hoffman, *Anonymous Soldiers: The Struggle for Israel, 1917-1947* (New York: Knopf, 2015).

about this case is that colonial officials remained unsure of the Church's involvement until just over a year into the fighting. At that time, they captured key documents linking the EOKA leader General Georgios Grivas to Archbishop Makarios. During the initial fifteen months of the conflict, a religious objective was suspected. By mid-1956 that goal was confirmed. This shift in understanding allows for a cross-temporal, within-case comparison of how British threat assessments and preferences shifted over the course of the conflict.

The third struggle I examine pitted British security forces against the Mau Mau movement in Kenya from 1952-1956. Rebel groups, in this context, drew on a mix of tribal rituals and superstitions. This case provides an opportunity to observe debate within the British security community because the leadership was initially divided about whether the Mau Mau should be considered a religious movement or not. In addition, it illustrates how racial biases can overlap with secular ones to influence strategic preferences.

For each case, I draw on original data collected from more than a half dozen archives in the United Kingdom, Cyprus, and Israel. British officials, civil servants, and security force personnel produced these archival sources at the time of each conflict. The majority of the information I draw on – which includes incident and situation reports, personal correspondence, and operational assessments and plans – comes from the War, Foreign, and Colonial Office files housed at The National Archives in London. I also incorporate those documents that were part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's "migrated archive", which have only been available to the public since 2013. This information is further supplemented by documents gathered from the Imperial War Museum, the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at King's College London, the Bodleian Libraries at Oxford University, the Israel State Archives, the Historical Archive of the Begin Center, the Haganah Museum Archive, and the Cyprus State Archives. Where appropriate, I also supplement my analysis with secondary source materials.

While the cross-case research design increases confidence in my claim that states play a critical role in obstructing the peaceful resolution of religious civil wars, it is through within-case process tracing that I formally test the hypothesized effect of strategic culture on the preferences of state officials.<sup>51</sup> As mentioned above, archival research into these cases enables me to trace threat assessments and debates within the British security community. I show that several policy options were available (and even considered) in each case, and I demonstrate as explicitly as possible how beliefs about religion played a significant role in steering policymakers away from bargained solutions.

Process tracing is particularly useful for understanding strategic preferences and decision making because it permits the examination of within-case observations in a single case. This enables scholars to "draw descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence," which are known as causal process observations (CPOs).<sup>52</sup> And, it increases the rigor of qualitative analysis by requiring scholars to be as explicit as possible about the types of evidence we should expect to find if an argument is true and the data that would cast doubt on a claim.

For each case under investigation, I present evidence of British views of their opponents, along with an assessment of a group's material capabilities and operational effectiveness. If my theory is correct, those threat assessments should align with the perceived identity of the insurgents, not merely be a reaction to a strong or lethal group. The extant scholarship, in

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<sup>51</sup> Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 4 (October 2011): 824.

contrast, suggests British response is a strategic reaction to the severity of violence or intransigence so often associated with religious insurgents.

As I will demonstrate, religious insurgents in the cases under investigation were no more violent than groups in other contexts that the British fought. In fact, the religious Zionist group in the case of Mandatory Palestine was the weaker and smaller of the three, armed organizations. This suggests there is more going on than simply interest-based calculations.

That said, I do not contend that material factors, especially military and economic issues, are unimportant in shaping threat perceptions and counterinsurgency strategies. I acknowledge when these take precedence, but also point to dynamics at play that may be overlooked when ignoring the religious dynamics of a conflict. Process tracing, in sum, helps to address a common critique of single-case studies, which asserts that researchers can always find cherry-picked support for their argument.<sup>53</sup>

Another concern of my method, this one often raised about the study of decision making, is that analysts can find it difficult to discern whether specific viewpoints play a causal role or merely serve as justification. This is a difficult issue to disentangle. Fortunately, a virtue of qualitative historical research is its careful attention to detail and sequencing. To that end, I pay particular attention to the process by which ideas about religion developed and came to dominate both private and public debate in each case. In several situations, policymakers did leverage the religious dynamics of a conflict to rally domestic support for or justify coercive measures. However, these actions almost always occurred after, not before, a consensus view had been reached amongst key decision makers. Since I draw primarily on confidential records and communiqués, we can be reasonably assured they are not just rhetoric used to stir up support at home.

### **1.4.2 Methodology**

Much ink has been spilled in recent years over how analysts should (or even if they can) define religion. This has resulted in two competing camps in the study of religion and international relations. On the one side are researchers – mainly quantitative – who impose a definition that can, with relative ease, be identified, operationalized, and measured. These typically emphasize the confessional identity of communities or their theology. Moreover, religion is, more often than not, distinguished from other ideational phenomena based on a group's beliefs in a transcendent or supernatural reality.

On the other side of the debate are critical international relations theorists who question the utility of the concept of religion all together.<sup>54</sup> They emphasize that religion is an invented category deeply embedded in power structures. It is neither transhistorical nor transcultural.

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Cornell University Press, 2014), 14.

<sup>54</sup> Examples of this line of scholarship include Erin K. Wilson, *After Secularism: Rethinking Religion in Global Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Markus Dressler and Arvind Mandair, *Secularism and Religion-Making* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Timothy Fitzgerald, *Religion and Politics in International Relations: The Modern Myth* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011); Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Beyond Religious Freedom: The New Global Politics of Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). These studies build on the work of scholars such as Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) and José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).

What we call religion today was conceived of and imposed by colonial powers. The analytic category is unhelpful, they argue, because it is constitutive of Western biases.

This scholarly fixation on religion as an object of analysis has obscured the way that political actors evaluate and grapple with this social force on a routine basis. The first camp has ignored this subject altogether, and the second has focused more on the origins than the impact of political elites' secular biases.

I offer a middle path for studying the influence of religion on political behavior that integrates interpretivist and constructivist approaches. Drawing on the former, I place the experience and understandings of government officials at the center of my analysis. I do not seek to uncover what religion *ought to* or *really does* mean. Nor do I impose my own definition of religion – whether that is one that emphasizes worldviews, ethics, practices, or community.

Instead, I seek to understand how particular actors construe and use the concept of religion in a specific environment. I then investigate how those ideas about religion influence the preferences and behavior of political actors. Rather than seeing the social construction of religion as a barrier to empirical analysis, I leverage it as strength.

My approach borrows from that of Ron E. Hassner, who has applied a similar methodology to shed light on how sacred sites and practices can motivate and constrain violence.<sup>55</sup> By taking the rhetoric and rituals of participants at face value, Hassner has placed the self-representation of religious practitioners at the forefront of his analysis. I, in contrast, draw attention to the way these confessional identities, beliefs, and rituals are understood by government and military elites.

My focus is on modern counterinsurgent forces during the early postwar period. I seek to understand how (if at all) bureaucrats collect, analyze, and interpret information about religion during insurgency wars. What do counterinsurgent forces define as religious phenomena? How do they distinguish between secular and religious dynamics? Do they construe the mixing of religion and politics during war as unusual? How do they interpret the motivations of opponents that mobilize along religious lines? How threatening do religious opponents appear? Do certain religious or religious phenomena appear as more threatening than others? Which strategic options do they believe are most efficacious for responding to religious uprisings?

I take political actors' responses to these questions seriously. I do not assume from the outset – as instrumentalist approaches do – that elites are merely framing their opponents in a way that justifies brutish repression. This may sometimes be the case. But theoretically, I start with the assumption that officials' evaluations of religion are genuine. In the empirical analysis, I tease out these two alternatives.

My approach, of course, comes with tradeoffs. Because I focus on how political actors at specific points in time construe religion, I cannot provide a definition that is easily generalizable across all spatial and temporal contexts. In this study, I make an argument for how Western policymakers define religion in the modern state system and why they share this relatively uniform conceptualization. But, this study has less to say about how political actors thought of religion at other points in time. It is quite possible that what British colonial officials viewed as religion in the early postwar period may be different than that of Spanish conquistadors during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, or, for that matter, officers of the British Empire during its formative period.

This is both a limitation and strength. My approach cannot point to easily transferable definitions of religion, but it does provide a framework for understanding how distinct political actors construe religion that can guide analysis across different temporal and spatial contexts.

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<sup>55</sup> Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*.

And, my theory illustrates a way for evaluating the impact of what state actors construe as religious, regardless of how they define it.

In sum, I present a framework for thinking about how government and military officials come to understand the role of religion in conflict, and politics more broadly. My starting point is that religion is a socially constructed category. However, I assert that this presents an opportunity for scholarship, not a reason to abandon the concept. We can study how political actors understand religion as a social force *and* how that understanding influences their preferences and behavior.

### ***1.4.3 Case Selection Criteria***

As outlined previously, this study analyzes three British counterinsurgency campaigns from the early postwar period: Mandatory Palestine (1944-47), Cyprus (1955-59), and Kenya (1952-56). These conflicts are an especially useful set of cases for understanding how military decision makers construe and combat religious opponents for five primary reasons.

First, they provide a structured comparative setting that reduces the influence of confounding variables (i.e., regime type, military doctrine, state capacity), and, thus, make inferences more credible. Because I am looking at how government and military elites perceive and respond to religious threats, it is important that we observe them in a similar political and social context. What makes the British cases even more helpful is the fact that many officials played a role in more than one of the cases. For example, John Harding served as a military advisor during the Kenyan Emergency before going on to accept the position of Governor of Cyprus during the first few years of the conflict on that island.

Second, these cases are a hard test for my argument. Communism, not religious extremism, was the dominant ideological concern at the time. Therefore, if I can show that decision makers exhibited concern for the religious nature of their opponents and this, subsequently, influenced threat assessments and policy choices during the early postwar period, it will be reasonable to assume a similar process is at play in more contemporary cases for which we have less data to test my theory.

Third, the colonial British preoccupation for record keeping and preservation means that a vast amount of data on military planning and operations remains accessible to the public. This is precisely the type of information needed to conduct careful process tracing during of the debates and decisions made in each case under investigation. A comparable amount of data would be difficult to compile for ongoing conflicts or even in some other historical contexts.

A real boon of the amount of data kept by British security forces is that it includes both their perceptions of their opponents and objective records on the size and capabilities of each group. The cases under investigation, therefore, allow me to test whether British concern over the insurgent groups had more to do with their ideas about religious violence or the severity of violence they faced. The extant scholarship suggests it has more to do with the latter. But, as I show, British views existed well before the most intense periods of violence in each case. In addition, religious insurgents were often weak and disorganized, especially in the case of Mandatory Palestine.

Fourth, British counterinsurgency campaigns, in general, stand out as a critical set of cases. No state has engaged in more insurgency wars over the past half century than Great

Britain, and contemporary COIN theorists draw on the British experience more than any other to understand ongoing conflicts.<sup>56</sup>

Fifth, the type and role of religion vary across these conflicts. The former point increases our confidence that the bias I highlight is not a prejudice against a specific religion. Variation in the role of religion enables me to also explore the conditions under which we should expect secular biases embedded in strategic cultures to drive state preferences about religious conflict outcomes. As mentioned above, my theory predicts that the correspondence between religious insurgents’ motives and actions should be highest for political elites under two conditions: (1) when religion plays a central, as opposed to peripheral, role and (2) when counterinsurgents are unfamiliar with the confessional community that insurgents represent. The cases under investigation provide both across- and within-case variation on these factors, as demonstrated in Table 1.1 below.

**Table 1.1: Case Selection and the Conditions that Influence Correspondence Bias**

		<i>Saliency of Religion</i>	
		<b>Peripheral</b>	<b>Central</b>
<i>Confessional Identity</i>	<b>Familiar</b>	Mandatory Palestine (Haganah & Irgun)	Mandatory Palestine (Lehi)
	<b>Unfamiliar</b>	Cyprus (1955 – mid-1956)	Cyprus (mid-1956 – 1959); Kenya (1952 – 56)

The case of Mandatory Palestine offers the opportunity for a within-case comparison because multiple groups fought against Great Britain. In general, British experience with Judaism both abroad and at home was rather well established by the start of the rebellion.<sup>57</sup> However, there was a sharp distinction between two sets of insurgent groups. One, known as Lehi or the Stern Gang, fought ostensibly create the State of Israel and build the Third Temple. Because of the central role of religion for this group, we should expect British strategic culture to at least have a moderate role in guiding their interpretations of the threat and possible responses.

The other insurgent groups in Mandatory Palestine, the Haganah and Irgun, were secular Zionists. They mobilized along confessional lines and the latter group did occasionally draw on religious rhetoric. Nevertheless, neither group explicitly fought for a religious goal. So, we should expect correspondence bias to play a more minimal role in British decision makers’ evaluations of these groups.

The case of Cyprus can be divided in a different way. The British faced a Christian insurgency, but one organized by an Eastern Orthodox community. Orthodox groups played a

<sup>56</sup> See David Kilcullen, “Counter-Insurgency Redux,” *Survival* 48, no. 4 (2006): 111–30; John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>57</sup> Jewish forces served in the British Army in both World Wars. And, Jewish communities were active in the political and economic life of the country. These factors are discussed further in Chapter 3. For more on the history of Jewish communities in the United Kingdom, see Tony Kushner, ed., *The Jewish Heritage in British History: Englishness and Jewishness* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 2012).

minor role in the United Kingdom prior to the mid-twentieth century, and the British Empire had limited experience governing territories with an Orthodox majority. That said, British understanding of EOKA's goals varied over the course of the conflict. At the start of the conflict, religion played a peripheral role – EOKA organized along religious lines but the British remained uncertain of their connection to the Church and commitment to the religious elements of *enosis*, or political union with Greece. By mid-1956, the British had no doubt that EOKA fought for religious objectives. As predicted by my theory, strategic preferences shifted away from bargained solutions over time. One reason for this is that their correspondence bias increasingly guided their understanding of EOKA.f

The Mau Mau movement in Kenya also falls into the same category as the latter stage of the Cyprus Emergency. The British ruled The Colony and Protectorate of Kenya for approximately three decades before the start of the conflict. But, they had only a limited familiarity with the traditional spiritual practices that insurgents leaned on to mobilize and manage their movement. And, while the Mau Mau were not explicitly fighting for a religious goal, the British determined they were anti-Christian and anti-European. Colonial officials feared their primary objective was to rid Kenya of any British or Christian influence and replace the latter with a new religion. Accordingly, correspondence bias should play a strong role in this case.

#### ***1.4.4 Scope Conditions***

While I focus on a tight set of empirical cases to explore my theory, its utility is not necessarily restricted to the British experience during the early postwar period. In general, my argument should be most helpful for understanding modern counterinsurgency campaigns waged by Western states. More specifically, this applies to societies with legal and moral commitments to a separation of religion and state. These are the cases in which similar societal norms about the role of religion persist due to a shared historical experience.

My claims are less likely to apply to states where the lines blur between religion and state. Under these circumstances, we should expect the “myth of religious violence” to not resonate as strongly. Consequently, government and military officials may reach different conclusions about the threat posed by and appropriate response to religious opponents.

Still, this study suggests a useful approach for how to investigate even those cases. Different societal norms about religion may endure in non-Western states, but they should influence a military's strategic culture through a similar pathway. And, they may result in a moderating effect that lessens, rather than amplifies, the relationship between insurgent motives and actions. Consequently, states with strong religious-state ties may be more, not less likely, to compromise with religious rebels.

#### ***1.4.5 Definitions***

The terminology used to study political violence poses a particular challenge in a project such as this. The memory of the conflicts under investigation continue to resonate strongly both in the now-independent countries in which they took place and the United Kingdom. For instance, former EOKA and Mau Mau insurgents (and suspected insurgents) have recently sued the British Foreign Office for state-sponsored human rights abuses during the Emergency

Periods in Cyprus and Kenya.<sup>58</sup> Veterans of each group insist they were patriots. The British, as we shall soon see, routinely referred to these fighters as terrorists, and worse.

The decision of how to refer to state and non-state actors, therefore, has meaning beyond this study. Sensitive to this issue, I follow the lead of one of the foremost historians of British counterinsurgency during the early post-war period, David French. In line with his approach, I employ the term “insurgent” or “guerrilla” – rather than freedom fighter or terrorist – to refer to the non-state groups that challenged British rule in each of the cases under investigation.

When I discuss terrorism, I do so as a tactic. In line with Bruce Hoffman’s definition, I consider terrorism to be the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in pursuit of political change.<sup>59</sup> All of the conflicts in this study include groups that used terrorism at some point, although some relied on this tactic more than others.

Finally, as this is a study of how states respond to religious insurgents, the primary focus is on government decision makers, which I also refer to as political and military elites or state officials. This comprises of all the political and military officials responsible for determining a state’s strategy against insurgents. In the British context, this includes both bureaucrats at White Hall and colonial administrators stationed in conflict zones. When I discuss the community of these decision makers both within and across states, I use the term security community. When I focus on just the military organizations of a state that conduct operations against insurgents, I use the terms security or counterinsurgent forces. These are used interchangeably and should be taken to include members of the three armed services, the regular police and Special Branch, and the auxiliary police and special constabulary. Finally, counterinsurgency refers to the military, paramilitary, economic, psychological, and civil actions taken by security forces to defeat an insurgent group.<sup>60</sup>

## 1.5 Objectives & Contributions

I have four primary objectives in shifting attention from rebel to government forces during religious conflict termination. The first, and most fundamental, goal is to bring the state back into the analysis of religious civil wars. Even while the broader literature on political violence increasingly emphasizes dyadic interactions, the scholarship on religious violence remains monadic. It is the rhetoric and violence of rebels that captures the imagination of analysts. Far less attention is given to the decisions and actions of government and military elites, despite their often-decisive role in religious civil wars.

Consideration of how statesmen and military officials think about and respond to religious uprisings has implications far beyond this study. Once we recognize the active role government forces play in conflict termination, we can begin to notice their influence on other civil war dynamics. For example, religious conflicts have been shown to involve more civilian

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<sup>58</sup> Katie Engelhart, “40,000 Kenyans Accuse UK of Abuse in Second Mau Mau Case,” *The Guardian*, October 29, 2014; Helena Smith, “Cypriot Veterans Win Right to Claim Damages over UK Torture Claims,” *The Guardian*, January 12, 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>60</sup> This definition holds with convention in the security studies field. See Ian F. W. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and Their Opponents Since 1750* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Anthony James Joes, *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004).



and combat casualties than nonreligious wars.<sup>61</sup> Yet, the perpetrators of this violence remain unidentified. Analysts often assume religiously motivated rebels are the primary culprits. Violence employed by state security forces may also account for these fatalities.

This study, therefore, suggests the utility of establishing a research agenda on the role of state forces in religious conflicts. In doing so, I hope to encourage others to further explore how some of the more destructive elements of religious violence may have as much to do with the way state forces respond as rebel behavior itself.

My second goal is to turn attention away from religion per se to its interpretation by political actors. Unlike the vast majority of scholarship on religious violence, I am not interested in how confessional identities, ideas, and practices shape combatants' behavior. This is not a story of the operations, doctrine, or culture of the extremist groups that so often captivate global attention with their haunting violence. It does not try to explain why or how insurgents draw on sacred scripture to deepen resolve or compel brutal attacks. Nor, does it interrogate the ways religious authority or communal rituals regulate intragroup dynamics and boost organizational resilience.

This is also not a study of the individual beliefs or practices of professional soldiers.<sup>62</sup> I do not consider how religion can motivate or constrain combat effectiveness. And, I do not explore the lingering influence of theological ideas on the contemporary ethics of war, such as in the just war tradition.

Rather, my interest lies in the *perceptions of religious violence* held by political and military elites. As discussed above, I seek to show how these actors understand religious and secular phenomena during the modern period and how these interpretations, in turn, impact political relationships. While I focus on this process during armed conflict, future studies might explore how government elites construe religious opponents during other types of contentious (e.g., demonstrations, protests, riots) or routine (e.g., elections, legislative debates) politics. My approach, therefore, offers a middle ground between treating religion as an objective category, on the one hand, and an essentially contested concept, on the other hand.<sup>63</sup> Even if religion is a socially constructed concept, it still has meaning for modern political actors.

Looking at how governments think about the faith of their opponents also expands our conceptualization of religion in important ways. Political and other social scientists that conceive of religion as an objective category focus almost exclusively on the confessional identities and beliefs of rebels. This misses a whole range of other religious dynamics, such as symbols, practices, social structures, organization, authority, and ethos, which comprise faith traditions. Perhaps unexpectedly, political and military decision makers are more aware of this wide array of religious dynamics than the extant scholarship. And, they are influenced as much, if not more, by the practices of rebel groups as their beliefs.

My third aim with this study is to provide a clear theoretical framework for understanding how decision makers' interpretations of religious violence influence strategic preferences for

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<sup>61</sup> Susanna Pearce, "Religious Rage: A Quantitative Analysis of the Intensity of Religious Conflicts," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, no. 3 (2005): 333–52; Toft, "Getting Religion?"

<sup>62</sup> A few recent analyses have drawn attention to the pervasive role of religion in even seemingly secular military institutions. These have made a valuable contribution by drawing attention away from the religion of rebels to that of our own armed forces. This project seeks to redirect attention in a different way – by drawing attention to how political elites think about the religion of their opponents. See Hassner, *Religion in the Military Worldwide*.

<sup>63</sup> On essentially contested concepts, see David Collier, Fernando Daniel Hidalgo, and Andra Olivia Maciuceanu, "Essentially Contested Concepts: Debates and Applications," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11, no. 3 (October 1, 2006): 211–46.

conflict outcomes. I am, of course, not the first to point out that political elites' underlying assumptions about religion can influence their preferences and behavior. Most notably, Elizabeth Shakhman Hurd and William Cavanaugh have demonstrated how secular biases shape, reinforce and, justify foreign policy relations between the West and the Middle East.<sup>64</sup> While these and others scholars offer a compelling argument for the roots and pervasive influence of these ideas, the precise causal pathway that links beliefs about religion to strategic preferences and policy choices remains unclear. How do underlying assumptions about religion influence decision making? Do they exert an independent effect? Do they limit the range of choices available? If they are so persistent, why don't we observe their effects more often?

I emphasize the intervening role ideas play in shaping political preferences and choices. And, I identify strategic culture as a distinct mechanism that links religious violence to conflict intractability. Shared beliefs, assumptions and habits of behavior in national security communities give meaning to particular threats, in the first place. And, they make certain policy options seem more or less efficacious.

My fourth, and final, aim is to both challenge and develop recent criticism of armed forces for failing to "get" religion in contemporary conflict settings. Modern militaries are assumed to be rational, bureaucratic institutions that prioritize traditional security threats. Drawing largely from the experience of U.S.-led forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, a near consensus has emerged that they, at best, misunderstand, the role of religion, and, at worst, ignore it all together.<sup>65</sup>

These criticisms and suggestions, however, are misleading. They assume that a secular bias means discounting religion, rather than construing it in a particular way. As I aim to show, government forces are neither as ill-informed nor as insulated from religion as contemporary analyses suggest. Quite the contrary, they think about it frequently, if not systematically, in conflict environments.<sup>66</sup> Secularism is a lens through which they understand religion, not a switchman that either drives their focus towards or away from it.

When we think of secularism as an influence that shapes perceptions of, rather than disguises, religion during conflict new policy prescriptions emerge. There is a precarious trend in recent studies that advises militaries to improve their capabilities to collect and scrutinize more religious intelligence. This advice ranges from better training for military personnel to drawing more on military chaplains to embedding cultural experts with divisions on the ground.<sup>67</sup>

This study provides a cautionary note to such recommendations. If decision makers hold the secular views I identify, then they are likely to interpret new information in a particular way. Most dangerously, they might suffer from a confirmation bias that gives more weight to reports

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<sup>64</sup> Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*; Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*.

<sup>65</sup> Robert A. Seiple and Dennis Hoover, *Religion and Security: The New Nexus in International Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Madeleine Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> For example, the French war ministry monitored the communications of Muslim units on the Western front during World War I, with a special interest in letters that conveyed reactions to the campaign against Ottoman Turkey and the caliphate movement. See Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 86. During World War II, the Allied Powers considered the religious and cultural significance of sacred sites when planning bombing campaigns, particularly in Italy. For example, prior to the bombing of Rome, officials deliberated the consequences of damaging historical and religious buildings, especially in and around Vatican City. TNA AIR 8/438: Rome: An Open City, 24 September 1943.

<sup>67</sup> Eric Patterson, ed., *Military Chaplains in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Beyond: Advisement and Leader Engagement in Highly Religious Environments* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

in line with their prior beliefs and discounts evidence that contradicts it. Thus, more information is only half the answer.

More sensitive analysis, which includes an awareness of cognitive biases, is also required to accurately evaluate the threat posed by religious opponents. This might include mechanisms that enable decision makers to make their secular beliefs and assumptions about religious opponents more explicit and those that encourage the formulation and discussion of several alternative viewpoints to avoid confirmation and correspondence bias.

To summarize, this study represents a significant departure from the conventional literature on religious conflict in four important ways. It is the first systematic examination of how government, not rebel, forces contribute to conflict intractability. And, in so doing, it redirects our analytical lens away from the beliefs of rebels to the perceptions of counterinsurgent forces. The analysis also identifies a specific causal mechanism that links perceptions of religious violence to state preferences. Finally, it provides a pivotal corrective for how modern armed forces can better analyze the religious dynamics of contemporary insurgencies. The way militaries evaluate and understand religious intelligence matters as much as the collection of such information.

## **1.6 Plan of the Study**

The remainder of this study expands on each of the main points raised in this introductory chapter. Chapter Two develops my argument for why and when state forces will be unlikely to compromise with insurgents they perceive as religious by exploring three interrelated questions. How do political and military elites construe religious opposition, in the first place? How do these core assumptions about religious insurgents influence strategic preferences? And, under what conditions will government and military decision makers' assumptions about religious violence most likely influence the decision making process?

The subsequent three chapters tease out the empirical implications of my theory. Chapter Three provides a within-case analysis of the Jewish insurgency in Mandatory Palestine from 1944-47. More specifically, I explore variation in British evaluation of and response to the three primary groups involved in that conflict: the Haganah, Irgun, and the Stern Gang. I show that religious nationalists were routinely construed as less rational and more uncompromising than secular Zionist groups. In addition, I demonstrate how these views militated against compromise. The British never considered a bargained solution with the Stern Gang a realistic possibility. Moreover, the inability of the Haganah to reign in religious Zionists contributed to the British decision to abandon attempts to reach a comprehensive peace agreement.

Chapter Four addresses events that took place in Cyprus from 1955-59. Exploiting cross-temporal variation, I show that British threat perceptions increased and the value attributed to negotiation efforts decreased as security forces came to recognize the critical role played by Archbishop Makarios III and the Church of Cyprus in the rebellion. A negotiated settlement was eventually reached due to international pressure, intercommunal violence, and British domestic concerns. Most importantly, Prime Minister MacMillan accepted a peace treaty that safeguarded the country's minimal strategic interest because it took away the opportunity for opposition leaders to criticize the Conservative Party in upcoming elections, not because he or other officials had some change of heart about Makarios or EOKA. If they were going to lose the

island, they would do it in the way that best suited British interests. EOKA accepted this compromise in which Cyprus achieved independence, rather than union with Greece.

Chapter Five investigates the Kenyan Emergency from 1952-1956. Here military planners exhibited varied opinions about the nature of the Mau Mau rebels at the start of the conflict. Several prominent figures, including Prime Minister Churchill and General Erskine, insisted the Mau Mau was a rational movement with political aims and a military strategy. Other key decision makers argued the rebels were driven by irrational, pseudo-religious beliefs. In a relatively short time span, the latter view came to dominate. And, British treatment of the Mau Mau reflects that predicted by my argument. It also demonstrates that correspondence bias is not restricted to one geographic region or the Abrahamic faith traditions.

Chapter Six concludes the study by summarizing the central argument, considering the broader reach of my claims, pointing to directions for future research, and discussing the policy implications of my findings. The main thrust of the conclusion focuses on suggestions for how both scholars and policymakers can make more productive use of the lessons of the past to understand religious conflict.

Theoretically, I emphasize the need to look at both sides of the battlefield when trying to understand the puzzle of religious conflict. And, I suggest ways that others might investigate how government officials construe religious and secular phenomena at particular points in history and how these interpretations, in turn, impact political outcomes.

Methodologically, I underscore the value of historical comparisons in broadening our perspective on how religion influences contemporary warfare. British counterinsurgency operations during the early postwar period suggest that many of the features that observers have seen as being peculiar to early twenty-first century insurgencies, can be observed in previous periods of conflict. Moreover, historical case studies offer exciting opportunities to collect and analyze the type of data government and military officials are unlikely to share about ongoing or recently completed operations.

For policymakers, I identify ways that decision makers can minimize their biases and improve the quality of their religious intelligence efforts. Correctly understanding the threat posed by religious opponents matters not only for academics, but also for those who wish to peacefully resolve such conflicts.

## Chapter 2

### Bringing the State Back in to Religious Civil Wars

#### **2.1 Revisiting the Puzzle of Religious Conflict Intractability**

Violence in the name of god (or gods) poses a grave threat to international peace and security. Attacks by the Islamic State, al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, the Lord's Resistance Army, and other religious extremist groups dominate our headlines. For this reason, politicians, pundits, journalists, and academics worry a great deal about how to manage and end civil wars in which religious divisions and beliefs ostensibly compel violence. David Cameron, for instance, warned the British Houses of Commons in 2013, "Those who believe that there is a terrorist, extremist Al Qaeda problem in parts of North Africa, but that it is a problem for those places and we can somehow back off and ignore it, are profoundly wrong. That is a problem for those places, and for us."<sup>1</sup> Never once to mince words, President Donald Trump has been even more straightforward about his unease at the resilience of the Islamic State. In his 2017 address to the United Nations, the U.S. President stated emphatically, "We will stop radical Islamic terrorism because we cannot allow it to tear up our nation, and indeed to tear up the entire world."<sup>2</sup>

The empirical record provides support for such concerns.<sup>3</sup> Religious civil wars have been steadily on the rise. From the mid- to late-twentieth century, the number of intrastate wars fought across confessional boundaries or for religious objectives more than doubled – jumping from 19% in the 1940s to 45% in the 1990s. Today, they account for half of all ongoing civil wars.<sup>4</sup>

The prevalence of religious civil wars is just one reason to worry. Equally troubling is the intractability of these conflicts. Armed disputes in which guerrillas fight explicitly for a religious objective - such as to create a state, or a region within the state, ruled according to a specific religious tradition – stand out as the most unlikely type of contemporary conflict to conclude through a negotiated settlement.<sup>5</sup> For instance, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front has fought

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Burns, "British Leader Sees Wider Threat in Algeria Attack," *The New York Times*, January 18, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Trump, "Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly" (September 19, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>.

<sup>3</sup> Religion, in general, remains a formidable force in global politics. Contrary to the predictions of what came to be known in social science circles as the "secularization thesis", modernization has led to neither a decline in religious beliefs or confessional communities. For a review of the persistent and pervasive influence of religion on world affairs, see Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011); Daniel Philpott, "Has the Study of Global Politics Found Religion?," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12, no. 1 (2009): 183–202.

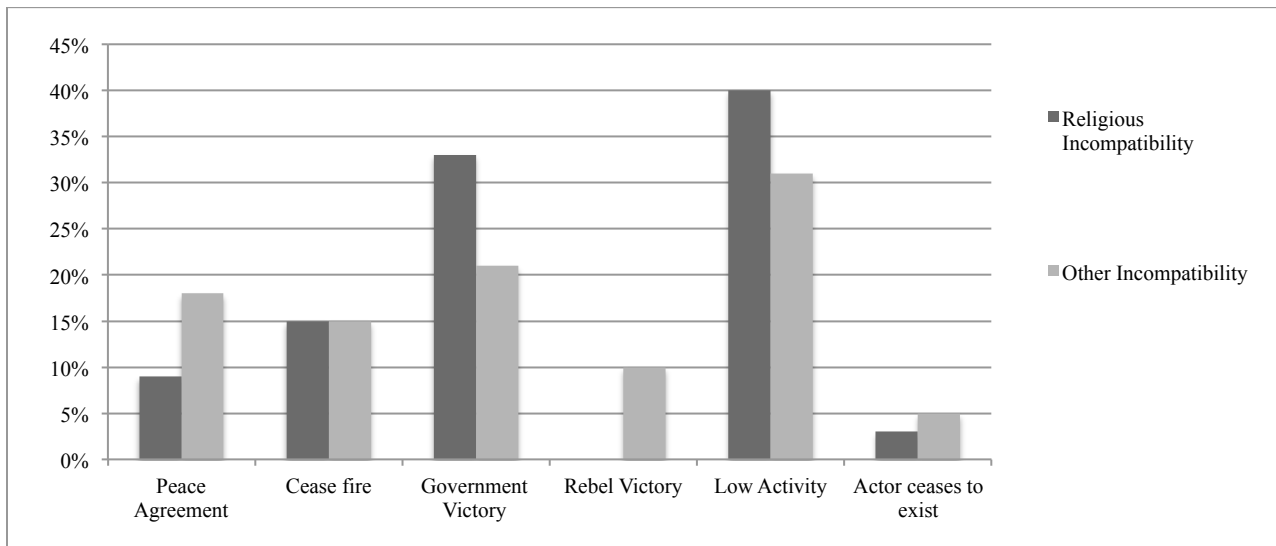
<sup>4</sup> These figures are drawn from Monica Duffy Toft, "Religious Civil Wars: Nasty, Brutish, and Long," in *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*, eds. Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011), 147–73. The data include civil wars that involve at least 1,000 battle deaths during the course of the conflict. The increase in religious conflict is even more dramatic if one considers armed conflicts that include a minimum of 25-battle deaths. Between 1975 and 2015, the number of religious conflicts according to that definition has increased more than 18-fold. See Isak Svensson and Desirée Nilsson, "Disputes over the Divine: Introducing the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) Data, 1975 to 2015," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 5 (May 1, 2018): 1127–48.

<sup>5</sup> Isak Svensson, "Fighting with Faith: Religion and Conflict Resolution in Civil Wars," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 6 (2007): 930–49; Monica Duffy Toft, "Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War," *International Security* 31, no. 4 (2007): 97–131.

since the 1970s to establish an autonomous region for the Muslim-dominated Mindanao region in the Southern Philippines that would be governed by Islamic law.<sup>6</sup> Another example is the Lord's Resistance Army, which has fought since the late 1980s supposedly for the creation of a theocratic state in Uganda based on the Ten Commandments. In both cases, numerous attempts to broker peace deals over the decades have repeatedly failed.

Figure 2.1 illustrates that these examples represent a larger pattern. It compares the percentage of religious and non-religious conflict-dyads to end in one of six termination outcomes between 1975 and 2015.<sup>7</sup> Those civil wars in which insurgents explicitly fought for religious goals were half as likely to be resolved through a negotiated settlement than conflicts fought over secular issues.<sup>8</sup> Conflicts with a religious incompatibility were also more likely to endure as a low-intensity conflict that still comprises of minor skirmishes between government forces, insurgent groups, and civilian populations.

**Figure 2.1: Conflict Termination Outcomes by Civil War Type, 1975 – 2015**



The consequences of religious civil wars are as clear and troubling as their intractability. Those fought during the second half of the twentieth century have been deadlier for both

<sup>6</sup> Despite a number of attempts to broker a peace deal, including a 2014 peace agreement, the group remains operational.

<sup>7</sup> These data are drawn from the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) and the UCDP Conflict Termination (v.2-2015) datasets. The RELAC dataset includes 420 civil war conflict-dyads, defined as two actors, with one or more being the government, that have a stated incompatibility. Unfortunately, the UCDP Conflict Termination dataset provides conflict outcomes for only 213 of these. The displayed descriptive statistics are limited to that sample. My findings are, however, consistent with other studies that investigate the relationship between religion and conflict termination patterns. See footnote 5. For more on the RELAC dataset, see Svensson and Nilsson, “Disputes over the Divine”. On the UCDP Conflict Termination dataset, see Joakim Kreutz, “How and When Armed Conflicts End: Introducing the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 2 (March 1, 2010): 243–50.

<sup>8</sup> Secular goals refer to aspirations for territory, self-determination of a particular ethnic, but not religious, group, like the Kurdish People’s Defense Force, or the establishment of a Marxist state, such as with the People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army in northeast India.

combatants and noncombatants than other types of armed conflict.<sup>9</sup> Civil wars are longer and bloodier when they don't end in a negotiated settlement because both sides continue to fight for a decisive victory.<sup>10</sup> Another reason for the lethality of religious conflicts is the use of terrorism both in and beyond the conflict zone.<sup>11</sup> More than 5,000 terrorist attacks alone have been conducted by or inspired by the Islamic State since 2002. These have taken place in some 42 countries and killed more than 30,000 people.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, IS-inspired terrorists have increasingly targeted civilians in Western Europe and North America.

Despite this obvious real-world importance, however, we still know relatively little about the protracted nature of religious conflicts. An initial wave of scholarship on religious violence in political science sprang up, unsurprisingly, after September 11, 2001 and focused on the causes of religious uprisings. This research was strongly driven by Huntington's *clash of civilizations* thesis.<sup>13</sup> Most notably, numerous scholars set out to empirically test (and cast doubt on) the idea that civilizational groups largely defined by confessional identities would be the major fault lines for conflict in the post-Cold War era. To date, the empirical evidence is overwhelmingly against Huntington's theory.<sup>14</sup>

A second wave of scholarship over the past decade has gradually shifted attention away from religion as a cause of war to the many ways it can shape the meaning and conduct of armed conflict. This research has looked at, among other issues, how religion becomes a salient issue during internal wars, its impact on conflict intensity, duration, and termination, and ways to manage and resolve disputes with a religious basis.<sup>15</sup>

These more recent studies helpfully redirect our attention away from religion as a driving force behind conflict onset to the many ways it shapes war. Unfortunately, they also remain monadic. As discussed in the introductory chapter of this study, the extant scholarship

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<sup>9</sup> Susanna Pearce, "Religious Rage: A Quantitative Analysis of the Intensity of Religious Conflicts," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, no. 3 (2005): 333–52.; James A. Piazza, "Is Islamist Terrorism More Dangerous?: An Empirical Study of Group Ideology, Organization, and Goal Structure," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 1 (January 5, 2009): 62–88; Toft, "Getting Religion?"

<sup>10</sup> Barbara F. Walter, "Bargaining Failures and Civil War," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 243–61; Barbara F. Walter, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement," *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 335–64; James D. Fearon, "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last so Much Longer than Others?," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): 275–301.

<sup>11</sup> Peter S. Henne, "The Ancient Fire: Religion and Suicide Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 1 (2012): 38–60; Laurence R. Iannaccone and Eli Berman, "Religious Extremism: The Good, the Bad, and the Deadly," *Public Choice* 128, no. 1–2 (2006): 109–29.

<sup>12</sup> "Overview: Terrorism in 2016" (College Park, MD: START-University of Maryland, 2017), [https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START\\_GTD\\_OverviewTerrorism2016\\_August2017.pdf](https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_GTD_OverviewTerrorism2016_August2017.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> As an example of studies that find a lack of empirical support for the clash of civilizations thesis, see Jonathan Fox, "Ethnic Minorities and the Clash of Civilizations: A Quantitative Analysis of Huntington's Thesis," *British Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 03 (2002): 415–34.

<sup>15</sup> See Jonathan Fox, "The Rise of Religious Nationalism and Conflict: Ethnic Conflict and Revolutionary Wars, 1945–2001," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 6 (2004): 715–31; Matthias Basedau et al., "Do Religious Factors Impact Armed Conflict? Empirical Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 5 (2011): 752–79; Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peacebuilding," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 6 (2001): 685–704; Isak Svensson and Emily Harding, "How Holy Wars End: Exploring the Termination Patterns of Conflicts with Religious Dimensions in Asia," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 2 (2011): 133–49; Fox, "Ethnic Minorities and the Clash of Civilizations;" Pearce, "Religious Rage;" Toft, "Getting Religion?"

concentrates almost exclusively on how religion influences rebel behavior at the expense of exploring its impact on state preferences and behavior. In addition, these studies rarely leverage research designs that can test the precise causal mechanism that links religion to conflict intractability. There exists, therefore, a clear puzzle concerning the protracted nature of religious civil wars. But, we still know relatively little about what explains this empirical pattern.

This chapter develops a novel argument for the intractability of religious conflicts. I contend that a significant part of the answer lies in how modern, Western counterinsurgents construe the threat posed by and respond to insurgent movements that draw on religious identities and ideas. State, not merely insurgent, intransigence is a critical barrier to religious conflict settlement.

## **2.2 A Theory of State Intransigence during Religious Civil Wars**

Because existing studies focus primarily on the organization and motivations of insurgents, they overlook the role state actors play in obstructing negotiation efforts during religious civil wars. My argument addresses this omission by providing an individual-level explanation for why and when counterinsurgent officials refuse to compromise with opposition movements that rely on religion.

A shift in focus from insurgent to counterinsurgent motivations during religious conflict raises three central questions. How do military and political elites construe religious opposition? How do these core assumptions about religious insurgents influence elites' strategic preferences? And, under what conditions will government and military officials' assumptions about religious violence most likely influence their decision making process? Drawing on insights from social psychology, along with religious and strategic studies, I present a theoretical framework that addresses each of these issues.

First, I flesh out how political and military decision makers interpret insurgent violence committed by groups that mobilize along confessional lines or fight for spiritual goals. I argue that religious violence has extremely high correspondence for political elites due to their strategic cultures. By this, I mean that Western officials share a cognitive heuristic – known as correspondence bias – that leads them to infer the motives of religious insurgents directly from their behavior, not external circumstances. Rather than see religious groups as fighting to protest unfavorable conditions, such as poverty or territorial occupation, political elites determine that the internal convictions of religious insurgents drive their activities.

These views are embedded and reinforced in Western security communities' strategic cultures. This concept refers to the sum total of pervasive and enduring beliefs, assumptions, and habits of behavior regarding military force that members of the national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other. The specific understanding of religious violence that I identify reflects a wider manifestation of public opinion that Western elites are socialized into – in this case a secular bias. It amplifies the perceived link between the behavior and motive of religious insurgents. The mechanism of strategic culture also helps to account for why there is extremely high correspondence for religious violence, but not necessarily armed resistance carried out by groups that mobilize around other identities, such as ethnicity, or ideologies, like Communism.

Second, I offer an explanation for how the high correspondence of religious violence militates against compromise. Because government and military decision makers infer the



motives of religious insurgents from their behaviour, they discount their opponents' willingness to settle and overestimate their resolve. Instead, they construe religious insurgents as having maximalist objectives, which reduces the perceived bargaining range. Religious violence, therefore, obscures the message of insurgents. It leads political and military elites to see opponents that mobilize along religious lines or fight for spiritual goals as irrational, uncompromising, and difficult, but not impossible, to eliminate through brute force. States, ultimately, succumb to a self-fulfilling prophecy that assumes their opponents will stop at nothing to overthrow the status quo, even when religious insurgents might assert their goals are otherwise.

Third, I outline the conditions under which the high correspondence of religious violence will most likely impact the decision making process of political and military elites during counterinsurgency campaigns. My theory predicts that two factors regulate how strongly this cognitive bias influences policymakers: (1) the saliency of religion in the conflict and (2) the level of familiarity a counterinsurgent force has with the confessional community that insurgents represent. As the first increases (i.e., religion becomes a more central issue in the conflict) and the second decreases (i.e., counterinsurgents face insurgents from a faith community with which they have had limited interaction in the past), military planners become increasingly more likely to succumb to their correspondence bias. Consequently, these are the conditions under which compromise is least likely.

The remainder of this chapter elaborates on each part of my argument, including an important caveat that clarifies precisely what my theory can and cannot explain about how state officials construe religion. In the following three chapters, I apply and test the empirical implications of my framework through case studies of British counterinsurgency campaigns during the early postwar period in Mandatory Palestine, Cyprus, and Kenya.

### ***2.2.1 How do Policymakers Evaluate the Threat of Religious Violence?***

This section elaborates on how policymakers interpret and evaluate the threat of religious violence. First, I identify a specific mechanism – strategic culture – that links religious violence to conflict intractability. These are a set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and habits of behavior that generally guide decision makers' interpretations of threats by helping them make sense of complex security environments. Second, I detail a particular assumption within strategic culture – known as correspondence bias – that drives decision makers' understanding of, and response to, religious violence. This shared assumption leads decision makers to directly infer the motives of religious insurgents from their behavior. And, it leads policymakers' to believe religious groups seek to radically alter the social and political order, even when this might not be the case. Third, I explain why modern, Western elites share the specific view of religious insurgents that they do. While existing studies on strategic culture typically focus on cultural differences, I identify a collective assumption shared by most Western states.

#### ***2.2.1.1 The Mechanism - Strategic Culture***

The first step in explaining the strategic preferences of counterinsurgent forces during religious civil wars is identifying how decision makers (if they do at all) evaluate the nature and threat posed by religious opposition. What do they identify as religious versus secular violence? Do they see the former on par with other types of bloodshed? Or, is there something particularly

jarring about attacks committed in the name of a god or gods, regardless of however else the group might mobilize?

Drawing on their strategic culture is one important way officials answer these questions, as well as evaluate threats more generally.<sup>16</sup> In this study, strategic culture refers to shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common historical experiences and societal norms, that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives.<sup>17</sup> It consists of what Alistair Ian Johnston identifies as an integrated system of symbols (e.g., argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors, biases) or psychologists refer to as cognitive schemata.<sup>18</sup> These are patterns of thought or behavior that organize categories of information and the relationships among them.

The mental structures that make up strategic culture serve to reduce uncertainty about the strategic environment by providing a framework for answering two sets of questions – one at the strategic level and the other at the operational level of war. The former involves assumptions about the role of armed conflict in political affairs, the nature an adversary and the threat it poses, and the efficacy of the use of force. It seeks to answer, for example, whether conflict is inevitable or aberrant; whether an opponent is rational or irrational; and, whether it is possible to contain or eliminate an opponent? At the operational level, a military's strategic culture is concerned with what strategic options are the most efficacious for dealing with the threat environment based off of answers to the previous questions.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately the answers to these questions establish pervasive and enduring strategic preferences that take on such an aura of factuality that they come to be seen as uniquely realistic and efficacious.

While there is no standard definition of strategic culture shared by all security studies scholars, my conceptualization captures several points of consensus. Namely, strategic culture is a collective set of ideas about the use of military force held by political and military elites that mirror larger societal views. It serves as a lens through which decision makers interpret threats and evaluate appropriate responses. And, it accounts for why actors see some means as more efficacious than others and certain ends as more desirable than alternatives.<sup>20</sup>

This is a helpful way to conceptualize strategic culture for three primary reasons. First, it is falsifiable (or at least distinguishable from non-strategic culture variables) and offers clear empirical predictions.<sup>21</sup> Second, it can be applied systematically to study how strategic culture influences a broad range of outcomes.<sup>22</sup> For religious violence, this means strategic culture will shape ideas about the appropriate role of religion in the public sphere, the rationality or

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<sup>16</sup> The concept of strategic culture has, of course, been applied widely in the security studies literature. Initially developed to explain the different nuclear strategies pursued by the Americans and Soviets during the Cold War, it has since been applied to a wide range of countries (e.g. Japan, Germany), regions (e.g. Scandinavia, Pacific Ocean) and security institutions (e.g. NATO). For a helpful overview of this research, see Rashed Uz Zaman, "Strategic Culture: A 'Cultural' Understanding of War," *Comparative Strategy* Vol. 28, No. 1 (2009): 68-88.

<sup>17</sup> Kerry M. Kartchner, Summary Report of the "Comparative Strategic Culture: Phase II Kickoff Workshop," Defense Threat Reduction Agency Advanced Systems and Concepts Office (Washington, DC: February 13, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Alistair Ian Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture," *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 32-64. Paul DiMaggio, "Culture and Cognition," *Annual Review of Sociology* 23, no. 1 (August 1, 1997): 263-87.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 38.

<sup>21</sup> Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture," 33.

<sup>22</sup> Existing studies overwhelmingly focus on how strategic culture influences grand-strategic preferences or nuclear policy.

irrationality of insurgents defined as religiously motivated, and the efficacy of force against such opponents.

Third, this conceptualization is consistent with developments in other fields of study that also explore the link between culture and political behavior. Social constructivist theories in international relations, for instance, have emphasized since at least the 1990s that culture is “an evolving system of shared meaning” that “shapes practice in both the short and long term.”<sup>23</sup> Before that, sociologists, most notably Ann Swidler and Charles Tilly, drew attention to “cultural repertoires”. Swidler argued that culture influences action by shaping a “repertoire or ‘tool kit’ of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct ‘strategies of action’”.<sup>24</sup> Tilly, in turn, identified “repertoires of contention” that represent an array of collective actions or possible strategies shared by a particular community to challenge political authority.<sup>25</sup> Finally, more recent advances in the literature on social cognition point to cognitive schemata, or mental shortcuts, that help order the mass of data that confronts us daily.<sup>26</sup> These represent “knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including its attributes and the relations among those attributes.”<sup>27</sup> Put another way, schemata describe a pattern of thought or behavior that organizes categories of information and the relationships among them. This encompasses specific biases, exemplars, and historical analogies.<sup>28</sup>

My conceptualization of strategic culture does diverge from traditional approaches in one significant way; I focus on a collective idea shared by most Western states. Most studies of strategic culture explore variation across national militaries. They argue that states all have strategic cultures, but their content differs based to some degree based on the formative experiences of the state and the philosophical, political, cultural, and cognitive characteristics of domestic populations and elites.<sup>29</sup> I emphasize convergence, rather than variation across states.

To summarize, I argue that strategic culture is a key mechanism that links religious violence to conflict termination outcomes. It consists of collective beliefs, attitudes and practices held by military and political elites regarding the use of force. It shapes how elites interpret and respond to threats. And, when it comes to religion, it is a shared bias embedded in Western security communities’ strategic cultures.

But, what exactly are the beliefs and assumptions policymakers hold about religious violence? Here, insights from social psychology and religious studies are particularly useful because they help us to disaggregate the “ideational milieu” that so many studies of strategic

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<sup>23</sup> Valerie M. Hudson, ed., *Culture & Foreign Policy* (CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 28-29.

<sup>24</sup> Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 273.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> See DiMaggio, “Culture and Cognition.”

<sup>27</sup> Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor, *Social Cognition: From Brains to Culture* (New York: Sage, 2013); Herbert Bless and Klaus Fiedler, *Social Cognition: How Individuals Construct Social Reality* (Hove, East Sussex, UK ; New York: Psychology Press, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> See Johnston, “Thinking about Strategic Culture.” An exception is Jack Snyder who did not find the roots of Soviet strategic culture deep in Russian historical-cultural antecedents, nor did he view strategic culture as narrowly determining strategic choice. See Jack L. Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations : A Project Air Force Report Prepared for the United States Air Force* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1977).

culture fail to unpack.<sup>30</sup> Strategic culture consists of a wide range of beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior. Yet, strategic culture is all too often presented as a singular concept that obscures multiple and even competing collective ideas.

This criticism suggests that one useful avenue for further developing our understanding of strategic culture is to isolate and study distinct assumptions and mental structures that make up a larger corpus of beliefs. My interest in this study is a key cognitive bias that specifically pertains to religious violence. In the following sections, I elaborate on this shared mental structure and why it is common to most modern, Western states.

### 2.2.1.2 Correspondence Bias: Inferring Motives from Actions

I argue that, despite other differences in their strategic cultures, Western security communities share a common assumption about religious violence – known as correspondence bias. This refers to a tendency to see religious insurgents as driven by their internal convictions, rather than situational factors. Western policymakers do not believe that religious insurgents fight to protest unfavorable conditions, even when that is a group's explicitly stated objective. Instead, they infer from the characteristics and consequences of their type of violence that religious insurgents are deeply committed to their cause and will stop at nothing to overthrow the status quo. In contrast, elites are more likely to consider the impact of external forces when evaluating the goals of other types of groups engaged in armed resistance against the state.

The remarks of President George W. Bush shortly after the attacks of September 11, 2001 provide a striking example of this tendency. During a NATO summit on combatting terrorism just two months after 9/11, he claimed "We have seen these terrorists in the nature of their attacks – they kill thousands of innocent people and then rejoice about it."<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, U.S. policymakers have been slower to draw a direct connection between the behavior and motivation of insurgent groups that mobilize in other ways, such as along ethnic lines. They have even on some occasions given substantial weight to situational factors that are outside the group's control. For instance, in a 1963 interview President John F. Kennedy expressed a remarkable degree of sympathy for Fidel Castro and his 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement. He stated, "I believe there is no country in the world...where economic colonization, humiliation, and exploitation were worse than in Cuba...I approved the proclamation which Fidel Castro made in the Sierra Maestra, when he justifiably called for justice and especially yearned to rid Cuba of corruption."<sup>32</sup>

American views of Castro, along with other Marxist-Leninist-inspired insurgencies, would soon sour. However, even later criticism of Communist uprisings tended to assign a substantial part of the blame to Soviet influence and material support, rather than merely ideological commitment. The decision to rebel was, more often than not, tied to poor socio-

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<sup>30</sup> A recent trend has been to look at competing subcultures. See Alan Bloomfield, "Time to Move On: Reconceptualizing the Strategic Culture Debate," *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 3 (December 1, 2012): 437–61.

<sup>31</sup> Bin Laden, at first, denied responsibility for the attacks. In later public statements, however, his statements align with a relatively stable set of policy objectives by al-Qaeda – the removal of U.S. troops from Saudi Arabia and an end to U.S. support for Israel. Policymakers, however, inferred larger motives.

<sup>32</sup> Jean Daniel, "Unofficial Envoy: An Historic Report from Two Capitals," *The New Republic*, December 14, 1963.

economic conditions or governance, or both.<sup>33</sup>

The reverse is often the case for al-Qaeda- and ISIS-affiliated groups today. Even those with less than clear links to Islamist extremist groups – such as those involved in fighting in and around Marawi in the Southern Philippines last year – are immediately portrayed as driven by religious convictions, not a commitment to end oppression and injustice.<sup>34</sup> These divergent views towards religious, on the one hand, and other types of violence, on the other, are largely driven by correspondence bias.

I situate this part of my argument in the domain of social psychology known as correspondent inference theory.<sup>35</sup> This framework tries to explain how and why ordinary individuals make sense of the motivations of others. It is especially interested in the way we draw deductions from what is perceived to be another's intentional behavior. Put another way, correspondence inference theory seeks to “systemically account for a perceiver's inference about what an actor was trying to achieve with a particular action.”<sup>36</sup>

Edward E. Jones and Keith E. Davis first developed this framework in the 1960s and 1970s. They were especially interested in explaining the conditions under which we infer that another person's actions stem from their internal disposition versus situational factors. Their decision making model built off the foundational work of Gestalt psychologist and “father of attribution theory” Fritz Heider.

One of the pioneering figures in the field, Heider argued we are like “naïve psychologists”; we observe, analyze, and seek to explain the behaviors of others.<sup>37</sup> This stems from a need to simplify, comprehend, and make predictions about the complex environment in which we live.

Heider argued that one of the primary ways we carry out this process is by applying inferential rules to make sense of another's behavior. This enables us to make predictions about how someone will act in the future and prepare accordingly. It also has the unintended consequence of leading us to see cause and effect relationships behind every action, even when none exist.

In laboratory experiments, Heider sought to isolate “what information is gathered and how it is combined to form a causal judgment.”<sup>38</sup> He found that while people developed many

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<sup>33</sup> This is also true for British policymakers. Colonial officials, for instance, often referred to the ethnic Chinese, Communist-inspired insurgents in Malaya as “bandits”, but called religious Zionists in Mandatory Palestine zealots and radicals. This is explained more in Chapter 3.

<sup>34</sup> Felipe Villamor, “ISIS Threat in Philippines Spreads in Remote Battles,” *The New York Times*, October 23, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> My claims are also consistent with the literatures in international relations on threat perceptions and the link between war and misperceptions. Studies in the former domain that sought to challenge the dominance of the realist paradigm have shown that identity and ideas are as important as material power in driving “threat perceptions. See F. Gause III, “Balancing What? Threat Perception and Alliance Choice in the Gulf,” *Security Studies* 13, no. 2 (2003): 273–305. Misperception theorists, in turn, investigate the many ways that decision makers' perceptions of their opponents diverge from reality due to cognitive limitations, or biases. See Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Arthur A. Stein, “When Misperception Matters,” *World Politics* Vol. 34 (July 1982): 505–26 Robert H. White, *Nobody Wanted War* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968); John G. Stoessinger, *Why Nations Go to War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974); Jack S. Levy, “Misperceptions and the Causes of War: Theoretical Linkages and Analytical Problems,” *World Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (October 1983): 76–99.

<sup>36</sup> Edward E. Jones and Keith E. Davis, “From Acts: To Dispositions The Attribution Process In Person Perception,” in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. Leonard Berkowitz, vol. 2 (New York: Academic Press, 1965), 219–66.

<sup>37</sup> Fritz Heider, “Social Perception and Phenomenal Causality,” *Psychological Review* 51, no. 6 (1944): 358–74.

<sup>38</sup> Fiske and Taylor, *Social Cognition*.

individual explanations for other people's behavior, these typically converged around two general types of attributions.<sup>39</sup> The first, known as an *internal attribution*, assigns the cause of a behavior to personal dispositions or characteristics. These consist of the traits, abilities, or feelings of another person. The second type of attribution, referred to as *external or situational*, sees behavior as driven by conditions or events outside a person's control. This can include the type of task or environment in which it must be performed.

As an example of these two attribution types consider the well-known, hypothetical scenario presented by Victor Hugo in *Les Miserable*.<sup>40</sup> Why does Jean Valjean, a French peasant, steal a loaf of bread from a shopkeeper in Paris? Does he commit this crime because he is greedy and disregards the rule of law? Or, is he compelled to do so in order to feed his sister's starving family? The first question is an example of an internal attribution; the second demonstrates an external one.

Heider sought to provide a general explanation for how we attach meaning to the behavior of others. This, however, left unanswered the question of why people make an internal versus external attribution for a particular behavior. Correspondent inference theory sought to resolve this crucial question.

Jones, Davis, and other colleagues made three important contributions to Heider's original framework.<sup>41</sup> First, they stressed that people focus more on deliberate, rather than accidental or careless, behavior. Jean Valjean so captures our attention not only because of Hugo's compelling storytelling, but also because he purposefully stole the bread. We are driven to understand what explains the reason behind his, and another's, choice. According to correspondent inference theory, an intentional action has three primary characteristics. The actor must be aware of the consequences of his or her actions. The actor must have the ability to perform the action. And, they actor must have meant to perform the action. Correspondent inference theory restricts its scope to explaining behavior that adheres to these three criteria.

Second, social psychologists interested in testing the effects of correspondent inference theory showed through experimental studies that observers tend to primarily interpret an actor's objective in terms of the characteristics and consequences of an action.<sup>42</sup> It is the outcome, not the process, of an activity that most shapes the inferences we draw. Jones offered the following example to illustrate the observer's assumption of similarity between the observed behavior and inferred objective of an actor: a boy notices his mother close the door, and the room becomes less noisy; the correspondent inference is that she wanted quiet.<sup>43</sup>

Third, correspondent inference theorists have found that not all behaviors are perceived as reflecting the true intentions of an actor. Some are simply noise, while others are perceived as merely suggestive. A teacher, for instance, may infer little to no level of anxiety from a student

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<sup>39</sup> Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1958), 9.

<sup>40</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> While the theory has been further developed and refined over the last few decades, its central theoretical claims and empirical findings remain consistent.

<sup>42</sup> Edward E. Jones and Daniel McGillis, "Correspondence Inferences and the Attribution Cube: A Comparative Reappraisal," in John H. Harvey, William J. Ickes, and Robert E Kidd, ed., *New Directions in Attribution Research*, Vol. 1 (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1976), pp. 389-420; Edward E. Jones and Richard E. Nisbett, "The Actor and the Observer," in Jones, David E. Kanouse, Harold H. Kelley, Richard E. Nisbett, Stuart Valins, and Bernard Weiner, eds., *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behavior* (Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press, 1972), p. 87.

<sup>43</sup> See "A Conversation with Edward E. Jones and Harold H. Kelley," in eds., Harvey, Ickes, and Kidd, *New Directions in Attribution Research* (New York: Routledge, 1978), p. 378; Jones and Davis, "From Acts: To Dispositions The Attribution Process In Person Perception," 225.

tapping his or her pencil in class before an exam, especially if the student has performed that same behavior at other points in the semester. In contrast, had the mother slammed, rather than merely closed, the door in the above example, the boy may have been even more likely to infer she wanted quiet since such behavior may be unusual.

The perceived congruence between observed behavior and inferred motive or trait is known as the *level of correspondence*. Jones also referred to this as the "attribute-effect linkage". This concept captures the extent to which an actor presumes the objectives of an actor are embedded in their behavior. It is defined as the extent to which the perceiver believes the true objectives or disposition of an actor to be reflected in the effects of a certain action.<sup>44</sup> When an action has high correspondence, the observer infers the objectives of the actor directly from the consequences of the action. With low correspondence, the observer either does not perceive the behavior as fully representative of the actor's intention or attributes it to external factors.<sup>45</sup>

Despite presenting an intuitive and concise model, correspondent inference theory is not well integrated into the study of military decision making. Political scientists occasionally draw on the general domain of attribution theory, especially the cognitive bias that leads decision makers to assign internal attributions to the activities of others. Few scholars, however, expressly consider the correspondent inference model developed by Jones and Davis.

The one notable exception is a 2006 study by Max Abrahms on why terrorist groups that target civilians, rather than military personnel and bases, are unable to achieve their policy objectives.<sup>46</sup> He argues this is because civilian-centric terrorist groups miscommunicate their policy objectives. Since this type of political violence results in the horrific deaths of innocent people, decision makers mistakenly infer that the horrific deaths of innocents is the primary motivation of the terrorist, and not the means to a different end. In other words, the motives of terrorists are directly inferred from the negative consequences of their attacks.

Abrahms' study provides an important contribution to better understanding how state elites identify and construe multiple threats in the same conflict environment. Similar to my claim about religious violence, he suggests that policymakers interpret civilian-centric terrorist groups differently than those that focus on military targets due to high correspondence. I build on his argument in two important ways.

First, theoretically, I provide explanation for why religious violence has high correspondence for Western policymakers. Abrahms asserts that a similar dynamic is at play for civilian-centric terrorism. But, he does not account for why civilian-centric, rather than military-centric, terrorism has high correspondence for decision makers.<sup>47</sup> It is plausible that policymakers see civilian casualties differently than military ones, but this is not well explained. He does not, for instance, draw on the three criteria outlined above. This leaves open the question of whether it is target selection itself or some other attribute of civilian-centric terrorist groups that may drive conflict termination outcomes.

Second, and empirically, I tease out a possible confounding factor that may account for the findings in Abrahms' study. He limits his analysis to twenty-eight groups designated by the

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<sup>44</sup> Kathleen S. Crittenden, "Sociological Aspects of Attribution," *Annual Review of Sociology* 9, no. 1 (August 1, 1983): 425–46.

<sup>45</sup> Jones and Davis, "From Acts: To Dispositions: The Attribution Process In Person Perception," 264.

<sup>46</sup> Max Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," *International Security* 31, no. 2 (October 1, 2006): 42–78.

<sup>47</sup> Abrahms links his claim to the broad finding in the conflict termination literature that maximalist objectives (e.g., demands over beliefs, values, ideologies) foreclose a bargaining range. But, again, there is no explanation for why terrorism has high correspondence. It is asserted, but the logic remains unclear.

U.S. Department of State as foreign terrorist organizations between 2001 and 2006.<sup>48</sup> This sample provide descriptive evidence that civilian-centric terrorist, compared to military-centric, groups fail to achieve their policy objectives. However, because the study does not control for other characteristics of these groups, including their size and lethality, it is possible that other variables may be driving the findings.

Most importantly for this study, when one disaggregates the civilian-centric groups into those with and without explicit religious objectives, a clear difference emerges. Religious groups in the sample are approximately twenty percent more likely to adopt a strategy that primarily targets civilians compared to groups with Marxist or only territorial objectives.<sup>49</sup> It is possible, therefore, that target selection is an intervening, rather than independent, explanatory variable.

The relationship between religion and terrorism becomes even murkier in the case studies. Two of the three examine conflicts initiated by religiously-motivated groups – Russian response to a series of domestic bombings in September 1999 and American reaction to the September 11, 2001 attacks.<sup>50</sup> The case of the Second Chechen War is particularly problematic since the insurgents in that conflict shifted from nationalist to Islamist goals after a prior armed conflict in the mid-1990s. Abrahms claims that it was after the 1999 apartment bombings that “Russians concluded that Chechen objectives had suddenly become maximalist.”<sup>51</sup> However, terrorist tactics are not the only characteristic of the insurgents to change around that time. They also became increasingly more religious.

In sum, Abrahms’ study demonstrates the utility of correspondent inference theory in understanding how policy makers interpret and evaluate multiple threats in a conflict environment. Decision makers directly infer the motives of insurgents from some, but not all, forms of political violence. What drives this variation, however, remains unclear. The argument posited here is that religious violence, not just target selection, has extremely high correspondence for Western security communities.<sup>52</sup> In the following section, I explain why.

### 2.2.1.3 The High Correspondence of Religious Violence

Why does religious violence have extremely high correspondence for Western policymakers? An answer to this question requires both an understanding of why this bias is common to Western security communities and how that experience, in turn, drives the congruence between religious violence and inferred motives. I discuss each in turn.

Analysts generally argue that states have different predominant strategic preferences that are rooted in the early or formative experiences of the state, and are influenced to some degree by the philosophical, political, cultural, and cognitive characteristics of domestic populations and

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<sup>48</sup> The majority of these are not insurgent, or guerrilla, organizations.

<sup>49</sup> Seventy-five percent (9 of 12) of religiously-motivated groups in the sample adopt a civilian-centric terrorist approach compared to 62.5% (10 of 16) of the non-religious groups.

<sup>50</sup> The third case study is of Israel’s response to the First Intifada. While it is true that Islamist groups did not have a major influence in this uprising, their presence – especially that of Hamas, which had a significant propaganda campaign at that time – obscures what inferences we should draw from this case.

<sup>51</sup> Abrahms, “Why Terrorism Does Not Work,” 63.

<sup>52</sup> Target-selection or other types of political violence may also have high correspondence. Such a finding would not contradict my argument, but it would also require an explanation for why policy makers directly infer the motives from those, but not other, actions. I offer such a theory for religious violence.



elites.<sup>53</sup> I agree with this starting point for the source of strategic culture. Shared assumptions about religious violence embedded in states' strategic cultures are a product of their historical experience and prevailing social norms. However, I argue that there will be consistency, rather than variation, across Western states when it comes to the way they infer motives of religious insurgents from their actions for two primary reasons.

The first is because of a general secular bias that emerged out of the formative period of the modern state system. The Peace of Westphalia brought an end to more than a century of religious violence in Europe and initiated a system in which the institutional differentiation of religion and state is a central characteristic of political units. The central point here is not that the end of the Thirty Years' War ushered in a period of declining religious belief. Rather, the pivotal change is the shift of authority from religious institutions to non-ecclesiastical authorities. This gradually led to the differentiation of a secular sphere of political activity, while religion became steadily more privatized. While this process unfolded in different ways in different parts of Europe, they all converged to a similar terminal point.<sup>54</sup> The idea that religion and politics do not mix well became enshrined in institutional arrangements that emerged out of mid-17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. In this way, the Peace of Westphalia stands out as a critical juncture that has shaped security policies towards religion in a path dependent way.<sup>55</sup> This process was most salient and influential in the West.

Prevailing social and cultural forces are a second influence on Western decision makers' shared views of religious violence.<sup>56</sup> This is because elites are trained in this context and, thus, shaped by societal norms. In most Western states this means exposure to what religious studies scholars call "the myth of religious violence".<sup>57</sup> This shared understanding is defined as a founding and pervasive assumption of the modern state system that portrays religion as an inherently destructive and irrational force that must be tamed in order to preserve social harmony. It arose because political elites found religion to be a convenient stock character to construe as the enemy of contemporary political order. It has proven to be an extraordinarily pervasive story in Western culture and now underlies many of the core institutions of modern states precisely because it is so useful.<sup>58</sup> For example, it is easy to observe in recent public debates about the use of force against Islamist terror groups, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS. Insurgent violence is portrayed as distinctively disruptive, divisive, and dangerous; state violence

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<sup>53</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 22; Colin S. Gray, *Nuclear Strategy and National Style* (Lanham, MD: University Press Of America, 1986); Jeffrey S. Lantis, "Strategic Culture and National Security Policy," *International Studies Review* 4, no. 3 (2002): 87–113.

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>55</sup> This claim is in line with a model of decision making developed by Thomas Banchoff to explain consistency in Germany foreign policy in the post-War era. See Thomas Banchoff, *The German Problem Transformed: Institutions, Politics, and Foreign Policy, 1945-1995* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999): 2.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Berger, for example, has shown how Japanese and German cultural beliefs and values acted as a distinct national lens during the post-war period. Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (New York: Knopf, 2014).

<sup>58</sup> For example, it has frequently been invoked by the U.S. Supreme Court to justify decisions on the Establishment Clause since the 1940s. See Cavanaugh, "The Myth of Religious Violence," 119.

appears justified and necessary. And, comparisons to past religious conflict in Europe often accompany these analyses.<sup>59</sup>

In sum, Western security communities' views of religion are shaped by both shared historical experience and prevailing social norms. For this reason, decision makers share secular assumptions, despite other differences in their historical experience, regime type, economic development, or geography. How does this influence the perceived level of correspondence between religious violence and inferred motive?

Three conditions stand out as particularly important for determining a perceivers' level of correspondence between motive and action. The above-mentioned sources of secular biases drive each to heighten the correspondence of religious violence.

The first relates to correspondent inference theory's focus on intentional behavior. Actions that are freely chosen will have higher correspondence than those imposed upon an actor. This is because we tend to infer that activities that are selected, rather than assigned, represent our true preferences. The basic intuition here is that we choose to commit actions that enable us to achieve our desires ends. And, this is precisely how religion is construed today.

Modern Western political authorities (and society writ large) construe religion as an individual and belief-oriented category – beliefs that one freely chooses.<sup>60</sup> This understanding derives from and reflects the Western experience after the Peace of Westphalia. As church authority became increasingly separated from political power, religion took on an increasingly privatized and cognitive role.<sup>61</sup> An emphasis on belief, rather than practice, shifted attention away from the social and ritualistic aspect of religion. Religious communities came to be understood as groups one chooses to join, rather than those into which one is born. And, religious dogmas are ideas or beliefs to which one freely (and oftentimes unambiguously) assents. The way in which religious rituals and communal norms also shape behavior drifted out of focus. This is not, necessarily, the case for other identity-based groupings. Ethnicity, for instance, is seen as a community into which one is born and from which it is difficult to exit.<sup>62</sup>

The second condition for high correspondence between motive and action concerns perceived expectancy. Initially, Jones and Davis focused the attention on the level of social desirability ascribed to a particular action. Behaviors that conform to communal norms are less informative than those that violate them. This is because there can be many reasons why someone adheres to community standards (e.g., one may have internalized these as true preferences or one may simply seek to avoid being shamed). In contrast, socially undesirable behaviors incur a clear cost that lead people to infer that they are performed out of conviction or a personal, but external, motivation.

Later revisions to correspondent inference theory expanded this idea to a more general set of expectations.<sup>63</sup> A similar logic applies. The more unanticipated a particular behavior, the more information is gained by observing that behavior. Behaviors that disconfirm prior expectancies,

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<sup>59</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, "Neo-Classical Counterinsurgency," *Parameters: U.S. Army War College* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 71–87; Edward Luttwak, "Dead End: Counterinsurgency Warfare as Military Malpractice," *Harper's Magazine* 2 (February 2007): 33–42; David J. Morris, "The Big Suck: Notes from the Jarhead Underground," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 83, no. 1 (2007): 144.

<sup>60</sup> Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*.

<sup>61</sup> William Arnal, "Definition," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 2000), 31.

<sup>62</sup> See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2008), 64–68.

<sup>63</sup> Judith A. Howard, "Further Appraisal of Correspondent Inference Theory," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 11, no. 4 (December 1, 1985): 467–77.

thus, are more likely to lead to a high level of correspondence than expectancy-confirming behavior.<sup>64</sup>

Again, the modern state formation process and enduring “myth of religious violence” mean that Western decision makers construe insurgents that mix religion and politics as aberrant. They share a secularist point of view that either calls for the complete separation of religion and politics or institutional differentiation.<sup>65</sup> The latter admits that religion might serve as the foundation for societal values and a source of political cohesion, but church and state should function separately. Political, including violent, movements that combine religion and politics are acting against social norms and expectations. Compare this once more to ethnic groups, which underpin the organization of most modern nation-states. After the Peace of Westphalia, political organization along ethnic lines has become the norm, even if an ethnic group does not have its own state. The point is that groups that mobilize on an ethnic basis are seen as adhering to international norms. Those that organize along religious lines are not.

The third condition that determines level of correspondence is referred to as hedonistic relevance. It highlights our tendency to ascribe personal motivation to an action that affects us negatively. For instance, if someone spills a drink on you at a party, you are more likely to think he or she did so deliberately than consider that the floor may have been slippery. Thus, we are likely to ascribe internal, rather than situational, attributions to actions that negatively affect us.

Religious violence has high hedonistic relevance for at least two reasons. First, some studies suggest that religious attacks are more lethal and cause more ruin than other types of violence. Second, religious violence has highly symbolic value. When rebels draw on religion during armed conflicts, they call up images of an era characterized by a century of chaos and bloodshed. So, even if they lead to less objective destruction, policymakers fear their destabilizing power. In addition, religious violence is understood to directly target the values and political systems of Western states. Consequently, religious violence includes both a physical and symbolic threat to decision makers. This increases its hedonistic relevance.

**Table 2.1: Determinants of the Level of Correspondence between Behavior and Motive**

	<b>High Level of Correspondence</b>	<b>Low Level of Correspondence</b>
<b>Intention</b>	Freely chosen (Example: Confessional identity)	Coerced action (Example: Abducted child soldiers)
<b>Expectancy</b>	Uncommon/low social desirability (Example: Mixing religion and politics)	Common/high social desirability (Example: Rebellion against corruption)
<b>Hedonistic Relevance</b>	Causes damage to the observer (Example: Physical and symbolic threat)	Does not harm the observer (Example: Selective, rather than indiscriminate, violence.)

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Recent work by critical international relations theorists, such as Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, highlight two particularly prevalent forms of secularism that have developed over the last two centuries. The first adheres to a strong form of secularism that sees no room for religion in public life. This is epitomized today by the French view of laïcité. A second adopts a weaker form, referred to as Judeo-Christian secularism. This type does not try to expel religion from public life, but it does favor institutional differentiation. Religion might serve as the foundation for societal values and a source of political cohesion, but church and state should function separately. In addition, religion need not be, and should not be, invoked regularly in public debate. See Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations*.

Table 2.1 summarizes the three factors that determine the level of correspondence between a particular action and an inferred motive – choice, expectancy, and hedonistic relevance. Observers will draw a direct link between motive and behaviors that are perceived to be freely chosen, socially undesirable or unexpected, and personally destructive. In contrast, if a behavior is imposed on someone, conforms to expectations, or does not negatively affect the perceiver, it will be construed as having a lower level of correspondence. The perceiver will attribute behaviors in this latter group as being more influenced by situational, rather than internal, factors. For these reasons, then religious violence has extremely high correspondence for Western decision makers. Secular biases that emerged from historical experience and endure through societal norms mean the three key determinants for high correspondence fit exceptionally well for religious violence.

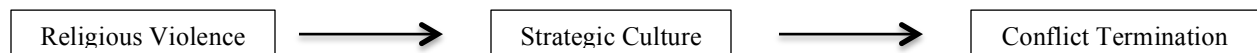
To summarize, I have identified strategic culture as a distinct mechanism that links religious violence to conflict intractability. And, I have highlighted correspondence bias as an influential collective assumption embedded in Western states’ strategic culture. These concepts explain why Western decision makers perceive the threat posed by religious insurgents differently than other violent non-state actors. The second part of my theoretical framework, to which I now turn, explains more precisely how this shared bias influences Western elites’ strategic preferences and choices towards religious conflict settlement.

### ***2.2.2 How Does Strategic Culture Influence Strategic Preferences in Religious Civil Wars?***

As discussed in Chapter 1, traditional models of religious conflict intractability envision a direct relationship between the religious characteristics of insurgents and termination patterns. This is because, according to these studies, religious identities, beliefs, and practices reduce the bargaining range of rebels. Religious civil wars do not reach a negotiated settlement because insurgents refuse to compromise.

My argument presents a new twist to this consensus view. I contend that government elites construe religious insurgents in the ways predicted by traditional models, regardless of whether rebels are actually motivated by their identities or beliefs. This is because Western security communities’ strategic cultures serve as an intervening variable that shapes interpretations of religious insurgents as more radical and less compromising than they might actually be.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, states often obstruct or undermine bargaining efforts that insurgents would otherwise be willing to consider. Figure 2.2 illustrates this relationship.

**Figure 2.2: Threat Assessment Model of Religious Violence**



The remainder of this section elaborates on how strategic culture influences state preferences and behavior during religious civil wars. First, I discuss the decision to conceptualize

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<sup>66</sup> My argument that strategic culture serves as an intervening variable applies specifically to the context of religious civil wars and the way it shapes policymakers’ understanding of religious threats. It should, therefore, not be read as a boarder claim about how strategic culture relates to other strategic outcomes.

strategic culture as an intervening, rather than independent, variable. Second, I outline the logic for how correspondence bias militates against state compromise with religious insurgents.

### 2.2.2.1 The Intervening Role of Strategic Culture

The intervening role of strategic culture is well established, though not uncontroversial, in the security studies literature.<sup>67</sup> It arises primarily out of a third generation of scholarship that pushed back against earlier conceptualizations of strategic culture as either a deterministic or instrumental variable. It is a helpful way to think about the influence of strategic culture during religious civil wars for at least two reasons.

One important insight of this research program, especially work since the 1990s, is that traditional, rationalist-materialist models of strategic decision making obscure the cultural factors that guide policymakers' responses to specific threats in the security environment. In line with social constructivist theories in international relations, it argues that a precondition to predicting how states respond to dangers is first understanding how they give meaning to specific "objective" or material variables. As summarized by Valerie Hudson, culture "governs perceptions, communications, and actions" and it "provides the elements of grammar that define the situation, that reveal motives, and that set forth a strategy for success."<sup>68</sup> Understanding policymakers' threat assessments, therefore, requires an awareness of the social context in which risks are evaluated and strategic choices made.

Despite its wide application in the interstate security literature, these constructivist insights have not been applied as widely to the study of state behavior during internal wars. As Paul Staniland argues, "Existing [civil war] research has subordinated agency to structure by too often assuming fixed interests and then assessing how varying capacity shapes outcomes. We also need to theorize and endogenize the interests of actors in order creation."<sup>69</sup> Understanding how state preferences arise in the first place will ultimately help us to better understand variation in government response during civil wars. Why, for example, do states crack down on some insurgent groups and tolerate others? Explaining how they interpret the threat posed by each is an essential first step in answering such questions.

A second important contribution from the third-generation of scholarship on strategic culture is that collective ideas limit, but do not determine, behavioral choices.<sup>70</sup> Collective beliefs, symbols, and biases condition responses by providing decision makers interpretive context.<sup>71</sup> They shape perceptions of events and opponents.<sup>72</sup> They also frame choices about military force by predisposing "societies in general and political elites in particular toward

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<sup>67</sup> Early studies of strategic culture emphasized its deterministic nature, making it hard to distinguish between beliefs and behavior. For example, first-generation scholar Colin Gray argued that the American national historical experience produced "modes of thought and action with respect to force" that resulted in a unique set of "dominant national beliefs" with respect to strategic choices. This way of thinking often conflated culture and behavior together. It, therefore, made it difficult to empirically test the influence of one on the other. A second generation of scholars pushed back, claiming strategic culture mainly serves an instrumental function. For a review of this literature, see Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture."

<sup>68</sup> Hudson, *Culture & Foreign Policy*, 28 – 29.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Staniland, "States, Insurgents, and Wartime Political Orders," *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 02 (June 2012): 254.

<sup>70</sup> Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture," 46.

<sup>71</sup> Forrest Morgan, *Compellence and the Strategic Culture of Imperial Japan: Implications for Coercive Diplomacy in the Twenty-First Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

<sup>72</sup> Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*.

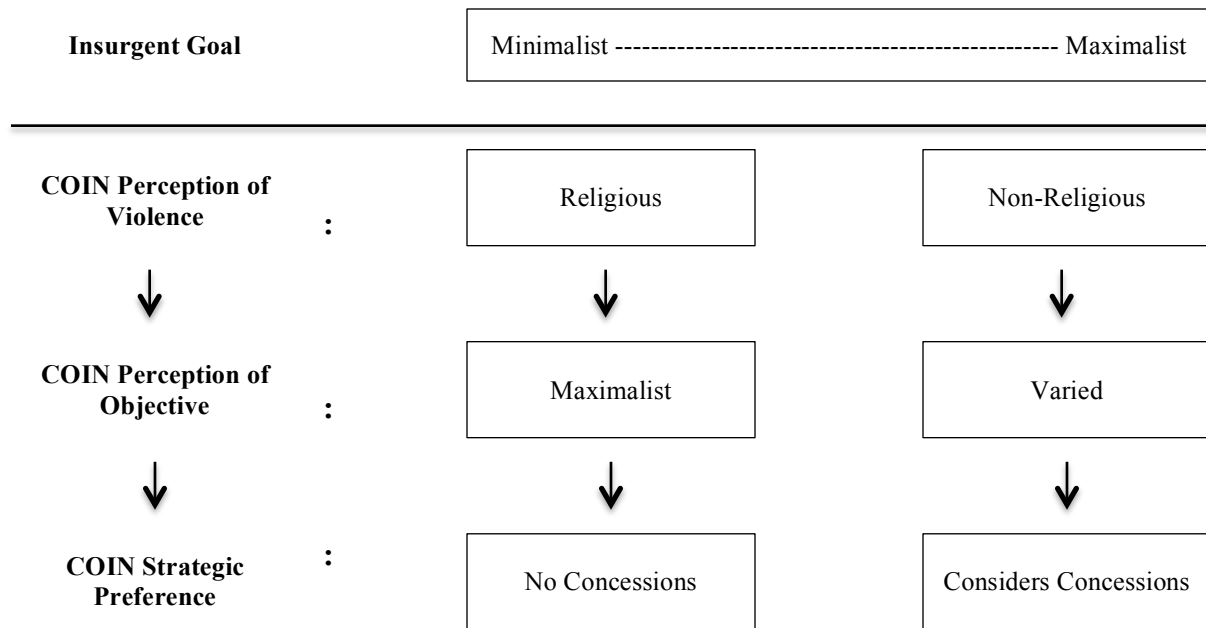
certain actions and policies over others.”<sup>73</sup> This again is in line with what Swidler and Tilly refer to as “cultural repertoires,” although the former emphasizes the independent impact of these ideas.<sup>74</sup> Some options will appear more efficacious than others, and some may not even be considered due to beliefs held in common.

To summarize, conceptualizing strategic culture as an intervening variable draws attention to the way policymakers’ give meaning to particular threats, in the first place.<sup>75</sup> It also highlights an important constraint on state response. Governments are not merely responding to material conditions. They do not merely balance against power; they also respond to perceived threats. How does this apply to patterns of religious conflict termination?

2.2.2.2 The Intervening Role of Strategic Culture in Religious Civil Wars

My argument is that strategic culture – specifically correspondence bias – serves as a lens through which policymakers interpret religious opponents and evaluate policy options. These beliefs and assumptions lead policymakers to directly infer the motives of religious insurgents from their actions. This impedes bargained solutions because policymakers discount their opponents’ willingness to compromise and overestimate their aggression. Figure 2.3 presents a model of my argument. The logic is as follows.

**Figure 2.3. Contingency Model of Religious Insurgent Groups**<sup>76</sup>



<sup>73</sup> John S. Duffield, “Political Culture and State Behavior: Why Germany Confounds Neorealism,” *International Organization* 53, no. 4 (1999): 771.

<sup>74</sup> Swidler, “Culture in Action”; Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*.

<sup>75</sup> I do not make an argument that this is the only way to conceptualize strategic culture.

<sup>76</sup> This model is adapted from Abrahms, “Why Terrorism Does Not Work.”

First, the actual aim of an insurgent group is not important. For analytic simplicity, we can assume a continuum of group objectives that fall between the terminal ends of either limited or maximalist aims. In line with the international mediation literature, I define the former as demands over territory or other material (i.e., natural) resources. Maximalist objectives, in contrast, refer to ideological demands. In particular, these denote goals to overthrow the status quo by either radically altering the political system (e.g., Communist reforms or Shari'a law) and/or upending societal values.

What is important is whether political authorities determine a group to employ religious violence, in whole or in part, or not. Theoretically, different states may call different things religious. As Elizabeth Shakman Hurd compellingly argues, the religious-secular distinction is “highly politicized, inflected with power relations, and historically variable.”<sup>77</sup> In other words, religion does exist, but the category is socially constructed.

While this idea has led to a proliferation of taxonomies and definitions among scholars, I hold with recent studies on secularism that there is remarkable convergence amongst political authorities in the West. As argued above, this understanding derives from and reflects the Western experience after the Peace of Westphalia. Today, most Western political authorities construe religion as individual and belief-oriented. And, they focus on those faith traditions that fit into the discourse of “world religions”, which emerged out of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Moreover, political authorities see a clear distinction between religion and other ideologies, such as Communism and nationalism.<sup>78</sup> This is primarily because the contemporary religious-secular distinction is now part of the legitimating conceptual apparatus of Western political authority. The state exists, in part, to tame religious impulses and promote nationalist ones.

Accordingly, religious violence is construed in much the same way conflict scholars study the phenomenon. The category of religion has meaning to government decision makers. It includes primarily those traditions that scholars have labeled “world religions” in the past. And, the focus is on observable characteristics that distinguish activity that draws inspirations from these faith traditions. Most notably, this involves mobilization and objectives.

The former can include combatant groups mobilizing supporters along religious lines, such as by making promises or appeals to shared religious identities or beliefs, using religious symbols and rhetoric to promote a cause, recruitment, or attempts to recruit, from sacred spaces (e.g., mosques, churches, temples), or targeting attacks against other faith communities to exacerbate divisions. It is important to note that groups will be considered religious even if they draw on other identities or employ materialist tactics. For example the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) used a mixed strategy of payments and calls to jihad to enlist disenfranchised youth during the Algerian civil war. There is little doubt that the government saw them as a religious threat.<sup>79</sup>

Religious insurgents can also be defined by the demands they make; most notably, when their explicit goals are anchored in a faith tradition. This often consists of announced aspirations to create a state, or a region within the state, ruled according to a specific religious tradition.

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<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, “Beyond Religious Freedom: An Introduction,” *The Immanent Frame*, March 17, 2016, <https://tif.ssrc.org/2016/03/17/beyond-religious-freedom-an-introduction/>.

<sup>78</sup> Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist, for instance, acknowledged that the flag is regarded by Americans “with an almost mystical reverence” in a supporting opinion for a proposed amendment against desecrating the flag. As William Cavanaugh emphasizes, it is the world “almost” that is crucial here. Nationalism and religion are similar, but not the same. See Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, 119.

<sup>79</sup> As another example, consider the Kamajor group in Sierra Leone. It mixed heroic myths and magical rites to mobilize and inspire participants. They are often labeled as a religious group.

Examples include the Forces of the Caucasus Emirates, which pursued their stated goal of creating an Islamic state in the region, and the Lord's Resistance Army, which announced an objective to create a theocratic state in Uganda based on the Ten Commandment.

Second, once an insurgent group is construed as religious, correspondence bias leads military and political elites to fixate on the short-term consequences of their opponent's actions. This means that officials will focus more on the death and destruction of an attack by religious insurgents than on what an attack might be trying to accomplish long term. Violence is seen as an end in itself, rather than a means. For example, following al-Qaeda's August 1998 attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, U.S. leaders emphasized the bloodshed and destruction. They also inferred that these attacks were a direct assault on the West. However, "not in a single press statement, press conference, or interview did a U.S. leader or diplomat explain why the enemies of America hate America."<sup>80</sup> Similarly, following a spate of attacks by Chechen guerrillas in Russia in the late 1990s, the government focused on the damage and disruption caused by the bombings. Little time was spent considering the motives behind the bombings.<sup>81</sup>

This is an especially important point in light of recent findings in the literature on religious conflict. A number of studies find that religious civil wars are especially destructive and lethal. Most notably, a higher number of combatant and non-combatant deaths have been reported in religious civil wars compared to other types of armed conflict.<sup>82</sup> What has not been shown, however, is which side is responsible for these losses. My argument suggests that states will also not try to discern responsibility. Even if religious groups ramp up their violence in response to state repression, governments will focus on the effect of this relationship only. This is because they infer a direct relationship between motive and action.

Third, military and political elites infer that religious insurgents have maximalist objectives, even when their explicitly stated objectives are otherwise. Because government and military decision makers infer the motives of religious insurgents from their behaviour, they don't take their opponent's stated objectives seriously. Instead, they believe that religious groups will not stop fighting until they radically alter the status quo.

Consider, for instance, that al-Qaida spokesmen have consistently maintained for almost two decades that the group's terrorist acts against the United States are intended to persuade American officials to withdraw troops from Saudi Arabia, terminate military interventions that lead to Muslim deaths (i.e., Chechnya, Bosnia, East Timor, and Israel), and end support for pro-Western Muslim regimes that suppress local populations (i.e., Saudi Arabia and Pakistan).<sup>83</sup> Bin Laden himself explicitly rejected on several occasions the claim that al-Qaida's goal is to directly challenge or overturn American values.<sup>84</sup> Yet, this is precisely the inference political elites draw from al-Qaeda attacks. Despite a vociferous and consistent message to the contrary, al-Qaeda is understood to have maximalist aims that seeks to overturn Western values. The same is true for other religious insurgent groups.

Even when rebel groups do have stated religious objectives limited to a particular region, it is often suspected that they really want to impose their views on the entirety of the state. Abu

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<sup>80</sup> Robert Fisk, "As My Grocer Said: Thank You Mr. Clinton for the Fine Words ...," *Independent* (London), August 22, 1998, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> See Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work," 63.

<sup>82</sup> See Pearce, "Religious Rage;" Toft, "Getting Religion?"

<sup>83</sup> See Abrahms, "Why Terrorism Does Not Work."

<sup>84</sup> "Bin Laden: 'Your Security Is in Your Own Hands,'" October 30, 2004, <http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/10/29/bin.laden.transcript/>.



Sayyaf in the Southern Philippines, for example, explicitly claims they are fighting to promote an independent Islamic state in western Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Yet, the Philippine government, especially under Duterte consistently portrays the group as trying to destroy the entire country.<sup>85</sup> And, while it is certainly the case that governments sometimes frame insurgents as more dangerous than they really are for instrumental reasons that is not the only reason policymakers reach such conclusions. Strongly held cognitive biases also lead them to overestimate the aggression and underestimate the willingness of religious insurgents to compromise.

Fourth, and finally, military and political elites are less likely to compromise due to the above inferences. This may be for several reasons, although the central point is that states are reluctant to compromise with groups fighting for maximalist objectives.<sup>86</sup> It is harder to reach a mutually acceptable resolution when the perceived incompatibility challenges the values and order of a society, rather than just territorial boundaries. On the state side, authorities may maintain a normative commitment to the political and social system they govern. They are, therefore, unwilling to compromise over these deeply held positions. Another, more cynical, reason may be that ruling regimes will be unlikely to remain in power if the status quo is overturned. Even compromises that limit the change to a particular geographic region may either inspire future unrest by other groups or undermine support by domestic populations.

Most importantly for my argument, a state's strategic culture shapes perceptions of which strategic options are the most efficacious for dealing with religious opponents. This includes ideas about the ability to control outcomes and to eliminate threats, and the conditions under which applied force is useful. The view of religious rebels as unreasonable and aggressive severely restricts which policy options appear most efficacious for responding.

Typically a state's repertoire consists of options ranging from compromise to coercion to brute force. The inference that religious insurgents have maximalist objectives casts strong doubt on the efficacy of the first two options. Since rebels in these environments are construed as aggressive and uncompromising, they are seen as less likely to be persuaded by incentives that will allow them to only partially achieve their objectives or disincentives that might threaten their well being. Religious rebels, it is believed, will not bargain nor change their behavior based on increased hardships on the battlefield. So, not only do state decision makers have disincentives to compromise, they may also doubt the willingness of their opponent to do so.

To summarize, religious violence obscures a group's policy objectives in such a way that it minimizes the likelihood of reaching a bargained solution with the state. Governments do not believe religious insurgents fight to protest unfavorable conditions, such as poverty or territorial

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<sup>85</sup> "Philippines' Duterte Tells Army Destroy Militants or Risk Islamic State 'Disease,'" *Reuters*, August 10, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-duterte-militants/philippines-duterte-tells-army-destroy-militants-or-risk-islamic-state-disease-idUSKCN10L15N>.

<sup>86</sup> The idea that authorities will resist compromise with groups fighting to overthrow the status quo is well supported in the bargaining literature. Empirical research on interstate bargaining, for instance, has demonstrated that territorial conflicts are more likely to be peacefully resolved than ideological conflicts. See Jacob Bercovitch, J. Theodore Anagnoson, and Donnette L. Wille, "Some Conceptual Issues and Empirical Trends in the Study of Successful Mediation in International Relations," *Journal of Peace Research* 28, no. 1 (February 1, 1991): 7–17; Daniel Druckman, Benjamin J. Broome, and Susan H. Korper, "Value Differences and Conflict Resolution: Facilitation or Delinking?," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 32, no. 3 (September 1, 1988): 489–510.; Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Langley, "The Nature of the Dispute and the Effectiveness of International Mediation," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37, no. 4 (December 1, 1993): 670–91. Similar findings can be found in the civil war literature. See Jacob Bercovitch and Karl DeRouen, "Managing Ethnic Civil Wars: Assessing the Determinants of Successful Mediation," *Civil Wars* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 98–116.

occupation. Rather, they infer religious insurgents seek to overturn the status quo from their behavior. This decision making process is shaped by a secular strategic culture that involves a heightened correspondence between religious insurgents' behavior and motives. And, it ultimately militates against compromise because political and military elites discount the efficacy of a negotiated settlement. It is not that religious insurgents are necessarily unwilling to make concessions; it is that they cannot credibly do so.

My argument presents one process by which underlying assumptions of religion can influence strategic preferences and choices. It does not, however, posit a deterministic relationship where the former necessarily leads to the latter. Nor, does my argument contend that material factors, especially military capabilities and economic issues, are unimportant in shaping threat perceptions and counterinsurgency strategies. Underlying assumptions about religion are but one of several factors that decision makers take into account when making strategic choices. When should we, then, expect correspondence bias to be most likely to influence decision makers? I address this question in the following section.

### ***2.2.3 When Does Strategic Culture Influence Strategic Preferences in Religious Civil Wars?***

The third, and final, part of my argument specifies the conditions under which correspondence bias towards religious insurgents should have the strongest influence on Western policymakers' threat assessments and strategic preferences. Two, in particular, stand out.

The first condition concerns the saliency of religion in a conflict. In keeping with other studies on religious violence, I argue that religion plays a more active or central role in conflict when combatants claim they are fighting for religious goals (e.g. to create a state, or a region within the state, ruled according to a specific religious tradition) than when they merely organize along confessional lines (e.g., making promises or appeals to shared religious identities or beliefs).<sup>87</sup> This is because religious demands represent a central incompatibility of the conflict; whereas, mobilization indicates that combatants identify with a specific tradition, but not that they are necessarily fighting for a religious cause.

Policymakers are more likely to draw on their strategic culture of religion as confessional beliefs and identities define the contested incompatibility of the conflict. Religion becomes harder to ignore under these conditions. When rebels fight explicitly for a religious goal they draw more on symbols, rituals, and identities. And, this makes it less likely that political and military elites will ascribe insurgent behavior to economic or other political motives.

The second factor that determines the influence of a strategic culture of religion is the level of familiarity a counterinsurgent force has with the confessional community that insurgents represent. I focus here on the history of interaction between the religion that an insurgent group claims to represent and the majority religion of the state from which counterinsurgent forces are drawn. For example, the British forces were well familiar with Hinduism by the time of the Indian Rebellion in 1857 given their role on the subcontinent from at least the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. It is not surprising, therefore, that British officials understood that conflict to involve not only religious grievances, but also economic ones. In contrast, despite closer geographic proximity, British policymakers' had more limited interaction with the Eastern Orthodox Churches. And, as discussed in the next chapter, this meant they focused on the religious aspect of insurgents' organization and demands on Cyprus. To recap, the less experience policymakers

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<sup>87</sup> Pearce, "Religious Rage," Toft, "Getting Religion"; Svensson, "Fighting with Faith".

have with the religion an insurgent group claims to represent, the more they will interpret insurgents through the lens of their strategic culture.

Why might this be the case? Research on social cognition compellingly shows that decision makers are drawn, in general, to simplifying heuristics, including cognitive biases the more unfamiliar a problem is.<sup>88</sup> The less experience a decision maker has with a problem, the more likely he or she is to draw on mental structures to simplify complexity and manage uncertainty.<sup>89</sup> Policymakers' correspondence bias towards religion, therefore, will be most strongly activated when confronted by an unfamiliar religious opponent.

In sum, my theory predicts that correspondence bias will most powerfully frame the way counterinsurgents evaluate and diagnosis the threat posed by religious insurgents under two conditions: first, when religion plays a central, as opposed to peripheral, role; and second, when counterinsurgents are unfamiliar with the confessional community that insurgents represent. As the first increases (i.e., religion becomes a more central issue in the conflict) and the second decreases (i.e., counterinsurgents face insurgents from a faith community with which they have had limited interaction in the past), military planners will become increasingly likely to succumb to their correspondence bias. Table 2.2 summarizes these conditions and their effects; representative examples are also provided. Conflicts that fall into the lower right-hand quadrant should be the least likely to involve states that compromise with religious insurgents. In contrast, those in the upper, left-hand quadrant are the most amenable to a negotiated settlement.

**Table 2.2: Conditions that Influence Correspondence Bias towards Religion**

*Saliency of Religion*

		Peripheral	Central
		Familiar	<i>Weak</i> (The Troubles: UK – IRA)
<i>Confessional Identity</i>	Unfamiliar	<i>Moderate</i> (1838 Mormon War: Missouri Militia – Danites)	<i>Strong</i> (Iraqi Civil War: US – al-Qaeda in Iraq)

**2.2.4. Important Caveat: The Category versus Components of Religion**

<sup>88</sup> Alex Mintz, “How Do Leaders Make Decisions? A Poliheuristic Perspective,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 1 (2004): 3–13.

<sup>89</sup> For instance, research on the use of historical analogies in strategic decision making finds that elites gravitate towards ideas that, at the very least, share surface commonalities, even if these are largely superficial features that the two events share in common. See Stella Vosniadou and Andrew Ortony, *Similarity and Analogical Reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Janice Gross Stein, “Threat Perception in International Relations,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, ed. Leonie Huddy, David O. Sears, and Jack S. Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

It is important to note one important limitation to my theoretical framework before concluding this chapter. While my theory considers how modern political authorities interpret, evaluate, and respond to the threat of religious violence, it does not explain why or how particular states focus on distinct religious dynamics of insurgents. As the following chapters demonstrate, the British were obsessed with the ritualistic oath taking of insurgents in Cyprus and Kenya. Had a counterinsurgent force from a Catholic or Buddhist majority country fought Orthodox Christian or Mau Mau rebels would they have been as concerned with these same characteristics? Or, might they have focused on other dynamics, such as spiritual authority or sacred space? While my theory provides a general model for how modern states conceptualize the category of religion, it cannot predict which religious activities a political actor will emphasize in a given context. Beliefs and stated objectives may stand out to some counterinsurgents; rituals, symbols, or practices may be the focus for others. This presents an exciting direction for future research.

The general predictions of my theory, however, do not depend on explaining this additional variation. What my framework hypothesizes is that when a state construes a group as religious (regardless of what they exactly focus on to make this determination) they will interpret the threat and policy options for response through their strategic cultures. And, this will militate against compromise.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

To summarize, the theoretical framework developed in this chapter provides an explanation for why and when state, rather than insurgent, forces may be unwilling to compromise during religious civil wars. I have argued that government and military decision makers interpret the motives of religious insurgents directly from the consequences of their actions due to a cognitive bias embedded in their strategic cultures. They are most likely to do this when religious demands represent a central incompatibility in the conflict and counterinsurgents lack familiarity with the confessional community that insurgents represent. Under these conditions, government officials are most likely to construe religious insurgents as having maximalist objectives, even when this is not the case. Political and military elites, consequently, discount the efficacy of a negotiated settlement with religious insurgents.

My argument also explains what modern political authorities generally conceptualize as the category of religion and why this view is shared across most modern states. Namely, due to the institutional differentiation that defined the transition to the modern state system after the Peace of Westphalia, political authorities think of religion as an individual, belief-oriented activity that is distinct from nationalism or other ideologies. This historical process explains why religion, but not necessarily other ideational factors, has extremely high correspondence for state decision makers.

The following three chapters provide empirical evidence for these claims through case studies of British counterinsurgency campaigns during the early postwar period in Mandatory Palestine, Cyprus, and Kenya. For each case, I draw on a wide-range of archival sources (e.g., situation reports, operational assessments and plans, personal correspondence, and War Office studies) to trace how decision makers interpreted and evaluated the religious dynamics of insurgent groups, along with the impact of those assessments on strategic preferences. What I find is that religious violence maintained high correspondence for colonial officials in these

varied context and that inferences derived from this bias militated, though to varying degrees, against compromise. It is to the first of these cases that I now turn.

## Chapter 3

### Mandatory Palestine (1944 – 47): Countering “Rabid and Hysterical” Insurgents in the Holy Land

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Despite the diverse number and types of insurgency wars over the past century, analysts focus overwhelmingly on a narrow range of cases. The most notable include successful counterinsurgency campaigns, as in Malaya and Oman, unexpected Great Power defeats, as with the U.S. in Vietnam and the French in Algeria, and contemporary conflicts that capture headlines, such as the recent U.S.-led operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. One case of particular neglect – and the focus of this chapter – is the Jewish insurgency that took place in British Mandate Palestine from 1944 – 47. The establishment of the state of Israel that resulted from this conflict has, of course, been studied extensively.<sup>1</sup> However, far less has been written on the decision making and conduct of British security forces during the final years of British rule.<sup>2</sup>

A similar inattention applies to other British counterinsurgency campaigns during the early postwar period, especially those that occurred in and around the Middle East and East Africa. While the British experience in Malaya (1948 – 1960) is a standard historical reference point for counterinsurgency analysts, it has also come to overshadow other conflicts around the same time period. Indeed, the two additional cases examined in this study – Cyprus (1955 – 59) and Kenya (1952 – 1960) – remained relatively understudied by scholars and policy analysts until the past decade.

This neglect is for at least two principal reasons. First, unlike other British counterinsurgency operations, these three cases cannot be held up as exemplars of “successful” military campaigns. British forces fared poorly in their attempts to deter and defeat Jewish and Cypriot insurgents. And, both of these conflicts ended with British withdrawal and the birth of new nation-states. Counterinsurgency efforts went better in Kenya, but the military success there ultimately led to political defeat. By 1960, the British would hand over control to the native Kenyan population and begin the transition from colonial rule to independence.

Second, until recently many important archival documents related to these conflicts were either unavailable or overlooked. The release of several hundred records since April 2013, however, provides new insight and interest into British operations in the postwar period. These have been made available thanks to pressure from a number of prominent historians of British

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Penslar, *Israel in History: The Jewish State in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*, 3rd Revised and Updated edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007); Leslie Stein, *The Making of Modern Israel: 1948-1967* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Several studies have explored how organizational preferences and the international context influenced the British campaign against Jewish insurgents during the postwar period. However, there remains no analysis of the religious dimensions to this conflict and fewer than a handful that focus on the strategic preferences and choices of the security forces. See Steven Wagner, “British Intelligence and the Jewish Resistance Movement in the Palestine Mandate, 1945–46,” *Intelligence and National Security* 23, no. 5 (October 1, 2008): 629–57; David A. Charters, “British Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign, 1945–47,” *Intelligence and National Security* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 1991): 115–40; David A. Charters, *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-7* (Macmillan, 1989).

counterinsurgency operations after World War II.<sup>3</sup> The exhumed files demonstrate levels of repression and force by colonial forces hitherto unreported.

This chapter, and the subsequent two, draws on these and other archival documents to explore British strategic threat assessments and preferences towards religious insurgents during counterinsurgency campaigns of the early postwar period. I begin with a case study of the earliest of those conflicts, the Jewish insurgency in Mandatory Palestine.

My primary interest in this chapter lies in demonstrating how the causal mechanism of strategic culture constrained British willingness to pursue a negotiated settlement to the conflict. I employ process tracing to illustrate both how British decision makers thought about the religious characteristics of their opponents and how these views worked against compromise in this case.

The armed conflict between Jewish and British forces following World War II is a particularly useful case to test my theoretical framework because there is within-case variation between secular and religious Zionist groups.<sup>4</sup> The former includes two organizations – the Haganah and Irgun. In contrast, Lehi, or what the British referred to as the Stern Gang, fought ostensibly to both create the State of Israel and construct the Third Temple. As predicted by my argument, the British saw the latter as more threatening than the secular groups and unlikely to accept a bargained solution.

The remainder of this chapter is organized into six parts. In the first, I outline my methodological approach for all three empirical chapters. In the second section, I provide a background summary of the conflict since it may be unfamiliar to many readers for the reasons mentioned above. In the third and fourth sections, I outline the religious dynamics of the conflict and British response, respectively. The fourth section, in particular, details how the correspondence bias embedded in British strategic culture linked these two factors. I show that religious violence had high correspondence and, consequently, political and military decision makers discounted the efficacy of a negotiated settlement to resolve the conflict. I consider alternative explanations for my findings in the fifth section. The sixth, and concluding section, summarizes the key pieces of evidence from this case that support my theoretical framework.

### 3.2 Methodological Approach

As mentioned in Chapter 1, there is no shortage of explanations for why religious violence leads to conflict intractability. At the same time, there are also few systematic tests of the proposed mechanisms linking this cause and effect relationship. In this and the subsequent two chapters, I employ process tracing to provide detailed empirical evidence of the role of strategic culture proposed in this study and test my explanation against the conventional wisdom for religious conflict intractability.

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<sup>3</sup> Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005); Huw Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Kenya Emergency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005); David French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> In addition, this case conforms to the case selection criteria set out in the introductory chapter of this study.

Process tracing is an analytic tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence within and across cases.<sup>5</sup> This is a particularly helpful method to demonstrate the plausibility and usefulness of my theory because it intentionally shifts the analytical focus from independent variables and outcomes to the hypothesized causal process that link the two.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to some criticisms, process tracing involves more than the production of detailed, descriptive narratives of particular events. Rather, this type of research aims to show as explicitly as possible the chain of steps linking the occurrence of purported causes and effects. It, therefore, helps researchers identify and test causal mechanisms, as well as deal with the potential spuriousness of observed correlational relationships.<sup>7</sup>

When using process tracing, analysts examine “diagnostic” pieces of evidence within a case to assess whether the mechanism or process they capture fits those predicted by the proposed theory or an alternative explanation.<sup>8</sup> These are often referred to as “causal process observations” (CPOs) or “mechanistic evidence”.<sup>9</sup> This type of evidence is an “insight or piece of data that provides information about context or mechanism and contributes a different kind of leverage in causal inference. It does not necessarily do so as part of a larger, systematized array of observations.”<sup>10</sup> This is because CPOs are often at finer level of detail than initially posited in a relevant theory. They are understood to be part of a temporal sequence of events or phenomena that do not necessarily produce an effect that is inherent in any one of them.<sup>11</sup>

The chain of events that these observations evaluate can be conceptualized in one of two ways: a minimalist or systems approach.<sup>12</sup> The former focuses on the observable implications of a proposed causal mechanism, but it does not theoretically or empirically unpack the actual causal process.<sup>13</sup> The mechanism remains, for all intents and purposes, a “black box”.

In contrast, a systems approach explicitly shows the constituent parts of a causal mechanism. Here the goal is to disaggregate the discrete steps of a causal sequence of events that should occur if a proposed mechanism is at play. Mechanisms are theorized and empirically tested as a system of interlocking parts that exhibit continuity, or flow logically, between cause and outcome.

There is, of course, a tradeoff between these two approaches. A systems method requires more evidence than a minimalist one since the researcher needs to demonstrate each part of the

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<sup>5</sup> David Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 4 (October 2011): 823–30.

<sup>6</sup> Derek Beach, “Process-Tracing Methods in Social Science,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Bennett, “Process Tracing and Causal Inference,” in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, ed. Henry E. Brady and David Collier, Second (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 207–20.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> For consistency, I refer to these as CPOs throughout the remainder of this study.

<sup>10</sup> David Collier, Henry E. Brady, and Jason Seawright, “Sources of Leverage in Causal Inference: Toward an Alternative View of Methodology,” in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, ed. David Collier and Henry E. Brady, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 184.

<sup>11</sup> Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing.”

<sup>12</sup> Beach, “Process-Tracing Methods in Social Science.”

<sup>13</sup> In contrast, a minimalist understanding does not theoretically unpack the mechanism. As evidence, it focuses on the observable implications of the proposed causal mechanism does. For example, Nina Tannenwald’s study of a nuclear taboo provides evidence that U.S. decision makers’ have been reluctant to use such weapons. However, the taboos precise impact on decision making is not explained. Rather, Tannenwald suggests it may be due to personal moral convictions, domestic opinion, and/or world opinion. See Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).



proposed causal chain. However, this ultimately allows for stronger inferences for two primary reasons. First, disaggregating the mechanism into its constituent parts allows for more logical scrutiny. This is particularly important when studying broad concepts like culture and worldviews. By unpacking a mechanism, a researcher needs to be as precise as possible about how exactly this factor links cause and effect. Second, this analytic process also means that each part of the mechanism can be empirically tested. Evidence that the constituent parts of the mechanism worked as predicted increases confidence in the theory. If evidence for one or more parts is absent, this does not necessarily mean the theory is invalid. But, it can suggest points of revision or further inquiry.<sup>14</sup>

For these reasons, I adopt a systems approach in this study. As spelled out in the previous chapter, two primary steps unfold between when a policymaker perceives an insurgent group as religious and their subsequent reluctance to compromise. First, officials fixate on the short-term effects of religious groups, rather than the insurgents’ stated policy objectives. This is because religious violence has high correspondence for modern, Western elites. Second, policymakers infer that religious groups have maximalist objectives to overthrow the status quo. As a result, bargained solutions are seen as ineffective means for dealing with the threat of religious opposition. This relationship is modeled in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: The Causal Mechanism of Strategic Culture**

Independent Variable	Causal Mechanism (Strategic Culture)		Dependent Variable
	Part 1: Information Gathering	Part 2: Strategic Preference	
Religious Violence	High correspondence leads decision makers to fixate on short-term consequences of insurgent attacks.	Decision makers infer maximalist objectives and discount efficacy of bargained solution.	Conflict Intractability

Finally, process tracing can be used to draw both descriptive and causal inferences that either support or cast doubt on proposed causal mechanisms.<sup>15</sup> The former involves characterizing and capturing the key intervening steps in a causal chain. It is concerned with isolating distinct moments in time, rather than observing change. The two-parts of the strategic culture causal mechanism presented in Table 3.1 serve as examples. Evidence of these observable components of a causal mechanism increases confidence that the proposed process is driving the outcome of a particular case. In this study, descriptive inferences illustrate not merely the effects of strategic culture on conflict outcomes, but also the discrete steps that lead from the perception of religious violence by policymakers to their ensuing refusal to compromise.

Causal inferences, in turn, examine variation across cases. These differences can span distinct contexts or involve differences across groups or temporal periods within the same setting. Four types of empirical tests are typically used to draw causal inferences when using

<sup>14</sup> Beach, “Process-Tracing Methods in Social Science.”

<sup>15</sup> Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing.”

process tracing: straw in the wind, hoop, smoking gun, and doubly decisive.<sup>16</sup> They are designed to either confirm or eliminate competing explanations based on whether passing the test is necessary and/or sufficient for accepting a particular inference.<sup>17</sup> They can be summarized as follows:<sup>18</sup>

1. *Straw-in-the-Wind Test*: Passing the test increases the plausibility of the hypothesis in question, but does not confirm it. Failing weakens the hypothesis, but does not eliminate it.
2. *Hoop Test*: Passing or “jumping” through the hoop increases the plausibility of the hypothesis but does not confirm it. Failing the test eliminates the hypothesis.
3. *Smoking-Gun Test*: Passing confirms the hypothesis. Failing does not eliminate the hypothesis.
4. *Doubly Decisive Test*: Passing confirms the hypothesis and eliminates alternative explanations.

Ultimately, these tests increase the rigor of qualitative case-study research because they require scholars to be as explicit as possible about the types of evidence we should expect to find if a theory is correct and the data that would cast doubt on a claim. This helps to address a common critique of single-case studies, which asserts that researchers can always find cherry-picked support for their argument.<sup>19</sup>

For this study, the strongest cases in support of my theory would conform to the following five observations: (1) an insurgent group leverages religious identities, beliefs, or rituals or is suspected of doing so to advance its cause, (2) insurgent groups that employ religious violence should not be motivated by a maximalist objective, that is, the desire to destroy or overturn the values or society of the target state; (3) government officials should fixate on the short-term effects of the religious insurgents’ actions, rather than their stated policy objectives (4) state decision makers should infer from the effects of religious violence that the insurgents have maximalist objectives; and (5) these inferences should impede the state from compromising with the religious group.

The above observations provide evidence that pass three of the four process tracing tests.<sup>20</sup> The first and third criteria pass a straw-in-the-wind test. They affirm the relevance of my theory, but the absence of evidence does not eliminate it. The second and fourth criteria apply to hoop tests since each is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for my theory to hold. Finally, the fifth observation passes the smoking gun test. Statements by leaders that they were less likely to compromise with religious groups due to the threat they posed provides strong support for my claims and casts substantial doubt on alternative theories that argue insurgents alone drive conflict intractability. That being said, failing to find evidence of this kind does not necessarily eliminate my theory that religious violence decreases decision makers’ proclivity to bargain.

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<sup>16</sup> Bennett, “Process Tracing and Causal Inference.” See also James Mahoney, “The Logic of Process Tracing Tests in the Social Sciences,” *Sociological Methods & Research* 41, no. 4 (November 1, 2012): 570–97.

<sup>17</sup> Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing.”

<sup>18</sup> This is as summarized by Bennett, “Process Tracing and Causal Inference,” 210.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Staniland, *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Doubly decisive tests are rare in the social sciences, so it should not be surprising that these are not present in this study. See Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, First (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 32.

Elites often refrain from explicitly stating their true preferences, so the absence of assertions to this effect does not necessarily mean elites did not hold such views. Statements that suggest the reason for not compromising with a group had little to nothing to do with religion, however, would call into question the usefulness of my argument.

In this and the next chapter, I provide both descriptive and causal CPOs in support of my theory. For the conflict in Mandatory Palestine, I show there is variation in how the British construe and respond to the three major insurgent groups. And, I offer descriptive evidence for the steps that connect these two outcomes. In Chapter 4, I conduct a similar analysis but look at cross-temporal variation during the Cyprus Emergency. Finally, in Chapter 5, I focus only on descriptive evidence because there is no within-case variation for the Mau Mau Uprising.

In each chapter, I draw on a wide range of archival materials collected over more than eight months. The majority of these records come from the War, Foreign, Colonial, and Foreign and Commonwealth Offices housed at The National Archives in London. This is further supplemented by documents gathered from the Imperial War Museum, the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at King's College London, the Israel State Archives, the Historical Archive of the Begin Center, the Haganah Museum Archive, and the Cyprus State Archives.

The specific types of documents that I examine include incident and situation reports that record tactical information, operational assessments and plans, strategic assessments, correspondence between colonial officials and administrators back home at Whitehall, and personal memoirs. In this chapter, I also draw on an especially useful set of documents from the Criminal Investigation Division of the British police force in Mandatory Palestine.<sup>21</sup> These profiled the characteristics and activities of insurgents from each of the three main insurgent organizations.

To summarize, process tracing can add important inferential leverage that is often lacking in quantitative studies. In particular, it allows researchers to investigate the chain of steps linking the occurrence of purported causes and effects. By drawing both descriptive and causal inferences, process tracing sheds light on the discrete components and influences of proposed causal mechanisms. The remainder of this chapter considers how well my theory explains the British response to Jewish insurgents following World War II.

### 3.3 Conflict Background

The Jewish insurgency against the British in Mandatory Palestine was one of the first post-war struggles for national liberation.<sup>22</sup> Aspirations for a national homeland in the region, however, began even before the transfer of authority from the Ottoman Empire to Great Britain at the end of World War I. The Balfour Declaration in November 1917 provided the initial spark for this hope. It was the first official statement by the British government to express support for the establishment in Palestine of a homeland for the Jewish people. The terms of the League of Nations' Mandate at the end of the war gave further reason for optimism, as it included a clause requiring such an effort.

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<sup>21</sup> The Haganah Museum Archive generously made these available for my review. I owe particular thanks to Dorith Herman, Director of Pre I.D.F Voluntary Organizations, for her assistance and hospitality.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed analysis of how the Jewish underground defeated the British and set in motion a chain of events that culminated in the creation of the State of Israel, see Bruce Hoffman, *Anonymous Soldiers: The Struggle for Israel, 1917-1947* (New York: Knopf, 2015).

The British, nevertheless, interpreted the Mandate requirements to apply to Jews already living in Palestine, not those in Europe. Immigration, thus, became the major point of contention leading up to the armed conflict. British restrictions on refugee flows met with consistent opposition during the 1920s, but it was the White Paper of 1939 that brought tensions to a head.

The White Paper rejected the concept of partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, and announced that the country would be turned into an independent state with an Arab majority. It severely curtailed Jewish immigration, allowing for only 75,000 Jews to migrate to Palestine from 1940 to 1944. This included a yearly quota of 10,000 per year and a supplementary quota for 25,000 to cover refugee emergencies spread out over the same period.<sup>23</sup> These restrictions, coupled with growing anti-Semitism and the shadow of war in Europe, led to strong opposition, mostly in the form of a massive wave of illegal immigration.

Violent resistance, at this point in time, remained limited. Nazi Germany remained the most pressing concern. David Ben-Gurion famously argued, for example, that the Jewish people should "support the British as if there is no White Paper and oppose the White Paper as if there is no war".<sup>24</sup> As a result, Jews living in Mandatory Palestine volunteered in large numbers to serve in the British Army. Of the 470,000 Jews in Palestine at the time, some 30,000 served during the war.<sup>25</sup> Such cooperation was short-lived, however.

With the Axis defeat looming in 1944, Jewish underground groups decided to terminate their wartime peace with the British. In February of that year, a rebellion was officially declared and a bombing campaign against British government offices and police stations kicked off the formal start to the insurgency. Three principal insurgent groups led the ensuing struggle. They are summarized in Table 3.2 below.

**Table 3.2: Summary of Jewish Insurgent Groups**

	<b>Haganah</b>	<b>Irgun (IZL)</b>	<b>Stern Gang</b>
<b>Size</b>	~21,000 members	~1,000 members	< 500 members
<b>Goals</b>	Protect settlers; Allow unrestricted immigration; Prepare for independent Jewish State.	Evict the British by force; Allow unrestricted immigration; Establishment of a Jewish State.	Evict the British by force; Allow unrestricted immigration; Establishment of a Jewish State, including construction of the Third Temple.
<b>Tactics</b>	Attacks on British immigration control; Limited attacks on British facilities.	Direct confrontation; Primarily attacks on British personnel and facilities.	Direct confrontation, including assassinations; Attacks on British personnel and facilities.
<b>Religious Dynamics</b>	Mobilization	Mobilization	Mobilization and Objective

The first group, the Haganah (“The Defense”), was founded in 1920 in response to violent clashes between Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem and Jaffa around that time. During its first few years, the Haganah was a loose organization of local defense groups in the major towns and

<sup>23</sup> Roza El-Eini, *Mandated Landscape: British Imperial Rule in Palestine 1929-1948* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 260 - 261.

<sup>24</sup> Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 200.

<sup>25</sup> Donald Niewyk and Francis Nicosia, *The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

settlements. Subsequent riots in 1929, however, led to the centralization and expansion of the group. By the end of the Arab Uprising in 1939, the Haganah had become the military wing of the major political body of the settler community, the Jewish Agency. Until 1945, the Haganah subscribed to a policy of self-restraint (“havlagah”). Fighters were instructed to only defend communities and not initiate counterattacks against Arabs or British forces. It was the largest and most well organized of the underground organizations.

The second group, known as Irgun Zvai Le’umi, or Irgun, formed out of a split within the Haganah over military policy.<sup>26</sup> Viewing self-restraint as defeatist, Irgun leaders felt it necessary to adopt offensive tactics to ensure the survival of settler communities. Inspired by the teachings of the Revisionist Ze’ev Jabotinsky, they believed that “every Jew had the right to enter Palestine; only active retaliation would deter the Arabs; only Jewish armed force would ensure the Jewish state.”<sup>27</sup> Following the 1939 White Paper, the Irgun also adopted a policy of direct confrontation with the British. Substantially, smaller than the Haganah, the British estimated it had about 1,000 fighters at any given time.<sup>28</sup>

Lohamei Herut Israel, or Lehi, was the third insurgent group.<sup>29</sup> The British typically referred to it as the Stern Gang. I adopt this terminology for the remainder of the chapter since my interest is in British perceptions of the group and this is the name under which they appear in most security reports and communiqués.

The Stern Gang also formed out of a split within an existing underground movement, but this time within Irgun. While the parent group’s leaders felt it necessary to call a brief truce with the British during World War II, members of Lehi took the opposite approach. They initially offered to fight alongside Fascist Italian and Nazi German troops in return for the transfer of all Jews from Nazi-occupied Europe to Palestine.<sup>30</sup>

This proposal never amounted to much, however. On the surface, the Stern Gang’s primary aims were not dissimilar to that of Irgun: to evict the British authorities from Palestine by force, allow unrestricted immigration of Jews to Palestine, and establish a Jewish state. Counter to Irgun, however, this group was more comfortable directly attacking senior British officials. Most infamously, they assassinated Lord Moyne, British Minister of State for the Middle East, in November 1944. The Stern Gang stands out as the smallest and most decentralized of the groups, comprised of only a few hundred fighters at any one time.<sup>31</sup>

While substantial tension existed between the underground groups before and during the war, by 1945, the Haganah, Irgun, and Lehi formed an alliance known as the Jewish Resistance Movement.<sup>32</sup> Putting aside their differences, the three major insurgent organizations shared intelligence and resources, and they coordinated attacks. During the movement's existence, eleven major operations were carried out; eight of them included the Haganah, and Irgun and the Stern Gang conducted three.<sup>33</sup> Of particular note was the Night of Trains in 1945, when the

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<sup>26</sup> The organization’s official name was Irgun Zvai Le’umi, which translates as “The National Military Organization”. It was also known in Hebrew by its acronym Etzel.

<sup>27</sup> Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 265-26.

<sup>28</sup> TNA WO 275/17: Divisional Notes: Sixth Airborne Division. April – June 1947.

<sup>29</sup> The organization’s official name was Lohamei Herut Israel, which translates as “Fighters for the Freedom of Israel”. The group was also known in Hebrew by its acronym, Lehi.

<sup>30</sup> Sasson Sofer, *Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy*, 1 edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 253-254.

<sup>31</sup> TNA WO 275/17: Divisional Notes: Sixth Airborne Division, April – June 1947.

<sup>32</sup> The alliance is also referred to as the United Resistance Movement.

<sup>33</sup> Charters, *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-7*, 52-60.

Haganah's elite fighting force, the Palmach, worked with the Stern Gang to sabotage railway networks across Palestine and blow up British guard boats in Jaffa and Haifa.

Following the King David Hotel bombing in July 1946, which killed nearly a hundred civilians, cooperation between the groups broke down. The Haganah once again limited their armed resistance officially to the protection of Jewish settler communities. The Irgun and Lehi, however, maintained policies of armed resistance against the British both in Mandatory Palestine and Europe. They also still occasionally coordinated attacks.

Notwithstanding the common roots, tactics, and recurrent collaboration between the Haganah, Irgun and the Stern Gang, the British reached decidedly different conclusions about the threat posed by each. This was influenced, in no small part, by the religious dimensions of the conflict.

### 3.4 Religious Dynamics of the Conflict

Although the majority of fighters in the Jewish insurgency were secular Zionists, religious dimensions still featured prominently. Most importantly for this study, confessional identities shaped how all three groups mobilized, although to varying degrees. In addition, the Stern Gang drew heavily on religious rhetoric, symbols, and practices. In this section, I outline these religious dynamics and their variation across the three major insurgent groups.

To begin, recall that my theory concentrates on government officials' perceptions of religion, not the "true" intent or objectives of an insurgent group. Therefore, what is important to note about the religious nature of insurgents in this case, and others, is the characteristics that political and military elites might observe and from which they might, subsequently, draw inferences about the motives of these groups.

The way in which insurgents mobilize is one important, visible feature. And, in the case of the Jewish insurgency, membership in all three groups, whether intentional or not, was limited to those with a Jewish identity. The Haganah, for instance, was rooted in the early paramilitary organizations that sprouted up after the Second Aliyah (1904 – 1914). These small, armed groups were comprised of Jewish immigrants who protected Jewish villages for a modest, annual fee. During World War I, forerunners of the Haganah served in the British Army as part of the Jewish Legion. And, after the Arab revolt in the late 1930s, the Haganah became a full-scale defense force with a formal command-and-control structure. Many of its members would serve, like their predecessors, in the Jewish Brigade of the British Army during World War II. The key takeaway here is that despite the Haganah not having religious goals or explicitly drawing on religious symbols or rhetoric, they formed and persevered as a group defined by their ethno-religious identity.

Irgun also consisted of only Jewish members and fought explicitly for secular goals – including British withdrawal and re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel. Their policy objectives, however, were based on what was called at the time Revisionist Zionism. As mentioned above, this included a belief that only armed force would ensure the Jewish state. Revisionist Zionism also differed from other variants in its territorial maximalism.<sup>34</sup> Irgun envisioned the State of Israel as encompassing all of what was Mandatory Palestine prior

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<sup>34</sup> Colin Shindler, *The Rise of the Israeli Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 100-104; Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel* (New York: Schocken, 2003), 347.

to 1921, when the Emirate of Transjordan was established. Compared to Haganah, then, Irgun had an ideology more at odds with the British. It is, therefore, the most direct comparison to the Stern Gang.

The third insurgent organization was the most explicitly religious. The Stern Gang, for instance, drew on religious images and identities for recruitment. The founder and namesake of the group – Abraham Stern – wrote and disseminated poetry ripe with religious imagery. Both he, and subsequent leaders, used this to promote their cause. One particularly vivid example reads, “I will teach my pupils; stand to arms, kneel and shoot. Because there is a religion of redemption— a religion of the war of liberation. Whoever accepts it—be blessed: whoever denies it—be cursed.”<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, the Stern Gang was the only group to appeal to ultra-orthodox Jewish societies.<sup>36</sup> Members of that community both fought for the Stern Gang and allowed the group to use their neighborhoods as hideouts. The Stern Gang also made frequent use of synagogues to hide weapon caches.<sup>37</sup> In fact, it was the only major group to routinely use sacred space to aid in their operational activities in this way. And, several members of the Stern Gang, including the prominent leader Moshe Segal, were part of Brit Hashmonaim a religious youth group that frequently distributed propaganda materials.

Finally, the Stern Gang had an explicit religious objective. While several of its goals matched that of Irgun, there was one notable addition: the construction of the Third Temple in Jerusalem. The organizer and namesake of the group, Abraham Stern, saw this as both a symbol of Hebrew independence and a religious obligation.<sup>38</sup> He also focused not merely on reclaiming land, but also the idea of redemption. In the group’s manifesto, known as the *18 Principles of Rebirth*, Stern wrote, “There is no sovereignty without the redemption of the land, and there is no national revival without sovereignty.”<sup>39</sup>

While the goal of constructing the Third Temple was only one of eighteen policy objectives, it did not go unnoticed by the British. Nor, did the other religious characteristics of the group. British security reports from the time make it clear that the British were not ignorant of the religious dimensions underpinning the Stern Gang.<sup>40</sup> The link was often implied. For instance, a situational report from 1946 depicts the Stern Group as “inheritors of the purest traditions of ancient Israel.”<sup>41</sup>

At other times the association between the Stern Gang and religion was more explicit. One surveillance report from the Criminal Investigation Department, for example, describes a Stern member as “orthodox and wears a black hat, side whiskers and a long overcoat...He is ready to do any work.”<sup>42</sup> Another report in 1946 noted that the armed caches found in the Great Synagogue in Tel Aviv were primarily connected to the Stern Gang, not Irgun or the Haganah.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> David C. Rapaport and Mark Juergensmeyer, “Some General Observations on Religion and Violence,” in *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 120.

<sup>36</sup> Zev Golan, *Stern: The Man and His Gang* (Tel Aviv: Yair Publishing, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> One of the primary locations was *The Great Synagogue* on Allenby Street in Tel Aviv, where a plaque today commemorates the buildings role in the conflict.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Heller, *The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics and Terror, 1940-1949* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 81.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> It is commonly asserted that the Stern Group had connections with Moscow, but British intelligence suggests that such links only formed in earnest after 1948. At the time of independence, for example, the British estimated that only 1 in 4 members assumed to have a pro-Soviet view. See TNA WO 275/79.

<sup>41</sup> TNA WO 275/58: Division Intelligence Summaries No 1-36, Jun 46 – Mar 47.

<sup>42</sup> The Haganah Archives, 47/337.

<sup>43</sup> TNA WO 275//108: Palestine Press Review, Nov 45-Sep 46, 12 Sept 1946.

Security forces also often linked religious disturbances to Stern Gang members, and not other rebel organizations. One of the more notable concerned the blowing of the shofar at the Wailing Wall on the Day of Atonement. This act was made illegal in 1929, but was occasionally engaged in by various insurgent groups as a sign of defiance. In fact, was Irgun that first challenged the British prohibition by blowing the shofar at the Western Wall to signal the start of the rebellion.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, British officers also noted a connection between Stern attacks and religious dates, while concurrently expressing surprise at other groups' neglect of the religious sensibilities of local Jews. On the former point, a 1947 weekly intelligence review from General Headquarters of the Middle East Land Forces speculates that a recent lull in violence by Stern members may be due to Jewish New Year celebrations.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, a 1947 incident report expresses surprise at an Irgun attack on the Haifa police headquarters during the Feast of Tabernacles and the potential for this action to result in a backlash of public opinion.<sup>46</sup> Comments like these suggest the British saw the Stern as more religious than the other groups.

To summarize, the case of Mandatory Palestine offers helpful within-case variation to test my theoretical framework, including the conditions under which decision makers should interpret the threat posed by insurgents through the lens of their strategic culture. In terms of the saliency of religion, all three groups in Mandatory Palestine organized along confessional lines. But only one, the Stern Gang, had an explicit religious objective.

In addition, the British were well familiar with both Jewish fighters and Jewish communities. As mentioned above, Jewish forces served in the British Army in both world wars. Moreover, British experience with Judaism abroad and at home was rather well established by the start of the rebellion.<sup>47</sup> Jewish communities were active in the political and economic life of the country, including a number of prominent members who served in Parliament from the Victorian period onwards. Consequently, the British conducted their operations with an eye towards local sensibilities. They wrote and distributed pamphlets on the proper procedure for searching synagogues, for instance.<sup>48</sup> And, they compiled a set of guidelines on the use of heavy weapons that took into consideration the potential backlash from damaging holy places.<sup>49</sup>

If my theory is correct, correspondence bias should be low for the Haganah and Irgun, but moderate for the Stern Gang. Consequently, the British should have interpreted the violence committed by the Stern Gang as more threatening than that by the other two insurgent organizations, even though their aims were largely the same. And, this should have militated against compromise. Had the British been less familiar with Jewish communities, the correspondence bias I detail below may have been even stronger.

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<sup>44</sup> See Golan, *Stern: The Man and His Gang*. See also TNA WO 275/120: GHQ MELF Weekly Int Reviews (Palestine Extracts) Nos. 25-160, September 1945 – April 1946.

<sup>45</sup> TNA WO 275/120: GHQ MELF Weekly Intelligence Reviews (Palestine Extracts) Nos. 25-160, September 1945 – April 1946.

<sup>46</sup> TNA WO 275/46: Ops and Incidents, July-Dec 1947.

<sup>47</sup> This is not to suggest, that Jewish communities did not experience discrimination. Anti-Semitism was prevalent both within British society and among the officer corps. See Anthony Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Sidney Sugarman, *The Unrelenting Conflict: Great Britain and the Making of Israel 1917-1948* (Leicester: Book Guild Ltd, 2000).

<sup>48</sup> TNA WO 275/13: Combined Military and Police Action for Platoon Commanders and Junior Police Ranks, June 1947

<sup>49</sup> TNA CO 968/96/2: Letter from the Colonial Office, 20 August 1945.



### 3.5 British Response

My theory predicts that British decision makers construed and responded to the threat posed by the Stern Gang differently than secular Zionist groups due to their strategic culture. Evidence in support of this claim would demonstrate two distinct steps in the decision making process. First, British policymakers should have interpreted the information they gathered about the Stern Gang differently than that of the Haganah and Irgun. More specifically, they should have fixated more on the short-term consequences of Stern Gang attacks, rather than the group's policy objectives, because of the high correspondence of religious violence. Second, British elites should have expressed a reluctance to negotiate with the Stern Gang because they inferred the group had maximalist objectives. This section provides evidence of each part of the causal process linking religious violence to conflict intractability driven by state intransigence.

#### 3.5.1 Information Gathering

One need not dig deeply in the archival records to see a clear difference in how British forces interpreted attacks by the Haganah and Irgun in comparison to the Stern Gang. They fixated on the damage caused by the latter. And, they often accepted the violence of the Haganah and Irgun as routine to armed conflict. Occasionally, they even went so far as to express a reserved type of admiration for the secular Zionist groups.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the incident reports of the major combat unit stationed in Mandatory Palestine, the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division. A report from the General Officer Commanding British Forces in Palestine and Transjordan in 1946 stands out as a typical example. Following an attack on railway workshops that June, he determined, "This action was carried out by the STERN GANG. It is typical of their exhibitionist methods. They are fanatical children, intent on self dramatization."<sup>50</sup> He went on to note that counter to the Palmach (the elite fighting group within the Haganah), which "like to show their efficiency and discipline," the "STERN like to show their disregard for death."<sup>51</sup>

These descriptions characterize a wide variety of other communications and reports. A 1946 security report notes a similarity in Irgun and Stern Gang targets, but notes the later are "fanatics."<sup>52</sup> Following another 1946 attack on the railway system claimed by Irgun and the Stern Group, a security report suggests that the latter is the "more skilled and ruthless" group.<sup>53</sup> This is a particularly surprising claim given that the Stern Gang was decentralized, poorly trained, and often characterized by infighting. Indeed, they launched almost immediately into operations after their founding. Unlike the Haganah and Irgun, they had limited to no previous fighting experience.<sup>54</sup>

The tactic of assassinating military and police officers especially frustrated the British. A 1947 weekly intelligence report from the General Headquarters for Middle East Land Forces further portrays the contempt that these tactics elicited in British officers: "After a period of relative quiet, the Stern gang has returned to its 'noble fight' by shooting British troops in the

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<sup>50</sup> TNA WO 275/40/2: Ops and Incidents, Jan-June 1946.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> TNA KV 5/36. Irgun Zvi Le-Umt B'erez Israel – National Military Organisation of the Land of Israel, 1946.

<sup>53</sup> TNA WO 275/42: Ops and Incidents, July-Dec 1946.

<sup>54</sup> Charters, *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-7*, 50-51.

back.”<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, a dispatch by U.S. Army intelligence in Cairo also reached a similar conclusion, stating that Stern Gang “acts are personally directed against individuals and are perpetrated without any care for human life.”<sup>56</sup>

Yet, two points are worth noting here. First, the Irgun also killed members of the Palestine Police Force. The most prominent of these incidents occurred in 1947 when Irgun hung two members of the British Army Intelligence Corps in retaliation for the execution of three of their captured members. Second, the success of European anarchist movements at the time, not religious beliefs, inspired the Stern Gang tactic of assassination.<sup>57</sup> Stern Gang members believed that such actions would convince the British they could not enforce law and order.<sup>58</sup> Regardless of their motivation, the British still fixated on the consequences of these and other attacks.

While the above examples capture the views of military officials, the Palestine Police Force unsurprisingly exhibited a similar sentiment. One representative arrest report, for example, notes that a captured suspect was “100% a member of the Stern Gang. Strong character and dangerous.”<sup>59</sup> In contrast, similar rap sheets for suspected Irgun members make note of their calm demeanor and moderateness.

Such views persisted throughout the conflict. Of particular note, the British continued to see the Stern Group, but not Irgun, as more destructive and extreme even after the most lethal attack of the conflict, the King Hotel David bombing. This assault on the British military offices in the hotel killed nearly one hundred civilians and was clearly connected to Irgun. They publicly claimed responsibility. In addition, a telegram back to Whitehall from Government House shortly after the event established that British officials in Mandatory Palestine believed the attack to be the work of Irgun.<sup>60</sup>

Yet, it was the Stern Gang that was initially blamed.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, it suffered the most as a consequence of the attack on 22 July 1946.<sup>62</sup> For example, security forces also became concerned about the rise of a new underground movement, self-styled as the Jewish Religious Fighters around this time. They speculated that the new group was an extension of the Stern Gang, not the organization that conducted that attack.<sup>63</sup> And, they increased their surveillance of Stern members.

Even more tellingly, however, Stern Gang members were the focus of Operation Shark. This was the massive cordon and search of Tel Aviv that followed the King David Hotel bombing. The city was divided into several cordons and individuals were systematically screened through a process administered by the Criminal Investigation Division. This operation captured massive arms caches, including one in the basement of the Great Synagogue of Tel

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<sup>55</sup> TNA WO 275/120: GHQ MELF Weekly Int Reviews (Palestine Extracts) Nos 25-160, September 1945 – April 1946.

<sup>56</sup> TNA FO 921/153: MacMichael to Stanley telegram, 26 March 1944.

<sup>57</sup> Charters, *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-7*, 51.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> The Haganah Archives, 47/37-50.

<sup>60</sup> See TNA WO 275/42: Ops and Incidents, July-Dec 1946.

<sup>61</sup> Wagner, “British Intelligence and the Jewish Resistance Movement in the Palestine Mandate, 1945–46”, 652.

<sup>62</sup> They also imposed a collective punishment, rather than relying on selective violence to deter and punish Irgun. The result was the Tel Aviv curfew, which is considered to be one of the more extreme tactics adopted by the British during the conflict. It included the mass arrest of some 1,100 residents and ended only after Rabbi Braz of Petah Tiqva wrote to Alan Cunningham, then High Commissioner, urging him to lift the curfew with the approach of Shabbat. Israel State Archives 2/4/1/1051: Curfew Imposed on Tel Aviv, 1946.

<sup>63</sup> TNA WO 275/58: Divisional Intelligence summaries: Nos 1-36, 01 January 1946 – 31 March 1947.

Aviv. In addition, it was considered successful only after the British felt they had rounded up the majority of the Stern Gang.<sup>64</sup>

The British response to the King David Hotel bombing mirrors a more general trend in the link it saw between the Stern Gang and Irgun. Although the two often worked in isolation, the former was consistently linked to the latter. An intelligence report following the King David Hotel bombing concludes, “Although the Irgun and the Fighters for the Freedom of Israel [STERN] are two entirely separate organisations their aims and tactics are exactly similar”.<sup>65</sup> This was a theme carried over into many other security reports, such as a general 1946 assessment of the insurgent groups. It claimed, “They [Stern Group] have been for some time fully co-operating with the Irgun Zvai Leumi, since both are equally committed to a policy of unrestrained extremism.”<sup>66</sup> The opposite connection, however, was rarely asserted.

The disproportionate focus of British attention on violence committed by the Stern Gang endured until the end of the conflict. The fortnightly report from 21 November 1947 of the 317 Airborne Intelligence Unit, for instance, argues that the Stern group is infected with an ideology that “permits any means to achieve an end and calls murder by another name when carried out on behalf of the Jewish people.”<sup>67</sup> An operational assessment of underground movements in 1947 further notes the moderateness of the Haganah and Irgun compared to the Stern Group. It concluded that the Stern Group “has made itself notorious for its lack of observance of the ordinary standards of decency in conducting operations and its disregard for human life.”<sup>68</sup>

In sum, British security forces evaluated the violence of the three major insurgent groups in Mandatory Palestine in very different ways. Despite similar tactics, especially between Irgun and the Stern Gang, more attention was given to the long-term, policy objectives of secular Zionist groups than the Stern Gang. The British understood the activities of the Haganah and Irgun to be part of a larger political battle. They even seemed to admire that struggle at certain points in time. At the very least, the British perceived the violence of secular Zionist groups as a means to an end.

In contrast, Stern Gang attacks did not appear as part of some broader agenda. Rather, the British fixated on their damage and destruction. And, that harm was construed as the primary goal of the group. This had important repercussions for how British security forces determined which strategic policy options would and would not be effective in countering these threats.

### ***3.5.2 Strategic Preferences***

On the surface, British officials abroad and at home maintained a firm commitment to holding on to Palestine no matter the cost. This translated into a combination of peacekeeping and offensive operations. The former characterized most of the first half of the conflict. From 1945 until June 1946, the British relied primarily on the Palestine Police Force to maintain law

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<sup>64</sup> TNA

WO 275/31: Operation SHARK (against members of Irgun and Stern terrorist gangs), July 1946.

<sup>65</sup> TNA WO 275/57: Intelligence Review of Palestine: Summary report of Insurgent groups, 01 November 1945 – 31 August 1946.

<sup>66</sup> TNA FO 371/52546/116: Jewish Illegal Organisations. 20, July 1946 Report.

<sup>67</sup> TNA 275/79: 317 Field Security Section Reports, 01 November 1946 – 31 May 1948.

<sup>68</sup> TNA FO 371/68632/ 2: Jewish activities in foreign countries in connection with Palestine: Safety of Brigadier Clayton. Code 31, file 109 (papers 9765 to end), 1948.

and order.<sup>69</sup> As General Sir Bernard Paget, Commander in Chief Middle East Forces, summarizes, “the Army has not yet initiated any offensive action: any fighting that has been done has been carried out in support of police operations.”<sup>70</sup>

Behind the scenes, the British also explored a political settlement. Indeed, even before the end of World War II, they considered what role negotiations might play in any future dispute in Palestine.<sup>71</sup> An MI5 report from 1943, for instance, suggested that Jewish activists might at some point use their paramilitary bodies “as a form of blackmail for securing their demands”.<sup>72</sup> Once the rebellion broke out, High Commissioner Alan Cunningham opened a dialogue with the Jewish Agency, or the political wing of the Haganah and the primary political organization representing the demands of the Yishuv. The primary sticking point of these talks, unsurprisingly, was immigration and partition.

By June 1946, peace talks deteriorated and insurgent activity dramatically increased. Consequently, the military began to play a more active and direct role. They spent much of that summer on the offensive conducting major search and arrest operations, especially in and around Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

A preference for coercion over pacification would progressively characterize British operations until their withdrawal in May 1948. What role did British perceptions of religious violence play in this shift in strategic preferences? Was the Stern Gang part of the reason the British turned steadily away from peace talks and pacification towards military force?

According to my argument, the correspondence bias embedded in British strategic culture would have limited which policy choices were deemed efficacious if two conditions hold. The first is that the British need to have inferred that the Stern Gang had more extreme goals than they actually did. These inferences would have been drawn from the consequences of their actions detailed in the previous section.

Recall that the Stern Gang explicitly fought to evict the British from Palestine, establish the State of Israel, and build the Third Temple. The first two of these goals were shared with Irgun. And, while building the Third Temple is a religious objective, the group envisioned this as more symbolic, than functional. They never claimed that they were fighting to impose Jewish law or to destroy the United Kingdom. Indeed, one former member of the Stern Gang, Geula Cohen, asserted years after the conflict that the group was thrust so quickly into the insurgency and suffered such disorganization that it “never had a chance to formulate its beliefs into a systematic program.”<sup>73</sup>

Yet, the British inferred differently. They saw the Stern Gang as an ideologically motivated, radical group. The fact that the British inferred maximalist aims from the Stern Gang is perhaps most clearly stated in a 1948 intelligence report to the Secretary of the State for the

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<sup>69</sup> This aimed at protecting British military and economic assets through the imposition of curfews, cordon and search operations, and the construction of security barriers around government facilities. It is firmly in line with what many scholars describe as a British strategic preference for minimal force. See Paul Dixon, ed., *The British Approach to Counterinsurgency: From Malaya and Northern Ireland to Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); French, *The British Way*.

<sup>70</sup> TNA WO 169/22881: Middle East Review, 01 January 1946 – 30 June 1946.

<sup>71</sup> This was done covertly so as to shield political elites in London from any unpleasant consequences these might produce at home due to the image of negotiating with “terrorists”. See Wagner, “British Intelligence and the Jewish Resistance Movement in the Palestine Mandate, 1945–46.”

<sup>72</sup> TNA KV 5/33: Kellar to Hunloke, 28 May 1943.

<sup>73</sup> Charters, *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-7*, 50.

Colonies: the Stern Gang has always been “rabid and hysterical.”<sup>74</sup> This view is also captured quite systematically in the weekly intelligence reports compiled and distributed by security forces in Mandatory Palestine throughout the conflict. Most of these documents would include a count of the number of insurgents from each group that had been identified, captured, or killed. And, this was typically divided into three categories: Haganah, Irgun, and extremists. Members of the Stern Gang were the primary subjects of this third category.

Yet, if any group should have been construed as seeking to radically overturn the British system, it should have been Irgun. It adopted a policy of total war. A 1945 publication of the group describes this strategy as follows, “Total War does not mean only bearing arms. We will not honour the rules of His Majesty’s Government. We will not obey its laws. We will not pay taxes. We will not recognize the authority of British officials. We will ignore the dictates of the courts.”<sup>75</sup> It may very well be that this was rhetoric aimed at undermining the resolve and will of the British Empire. However, it comes much closer to a maximalist objective than anything the Stern Gang ever published. Their stated objectives focused on territory and sovereignty.

Once the British inferred that the Stern Gang had maximalist aims, a political settlement became improbable. This is the second condition for my argument. Because groups with maximalist goals challenge the values and order of a society, it is more difficult for negotiating parties to envision mutually acceptable terms. This dynamic played out in two ways in Mandatory Palestine.

First, the British never considered negotiations with the Stern Gang a viable option. They construed the group as zealous and irrational from the start. Consequently, they believed that Stern members had no, “intention of easing up with their attacks against the security forces...and will listen to no amount of reasonable argument that they should do so. They are rabid and beyond reasoning.”<sup>76</sup> This was a view echoed both in Palestine and London. A typical example of the latter can be seen in the remarks of Prime Minister Winston Churchill following the Stern Gang assassination of the British Minister of State in the Middle East, Lord Moyne. Addressing the House of Commons, Churchill emphatically stated, “If there is to be any hope of a peaceful and successful future for Zionism these wicked activities must cease, and those responsible for them must be destroyed *root and branch*.”<sup>77</sup>

Second, the coordination between all three insurgent groups ultimately undermined the possibility of even the most restrained group, the Haganah, from reaching a deal with the British. Time and again, British officials expressed fears that any deal with the Jewish Agency and Haganah would not ultimately bring an end to the conflict. This is because they envisioned a tighter link between the three than actually existed. Even before the formation of the Jewish Resistance Movement, High Commissioner Cunningham expressed concerns that the Haganah would eventually work with Irgun and the Stern Gang.<sup>78</sup> And, after the alliance terminated, the British continued to assume there was more coordination than actually took place. For example, in late 1946, MI5 reported that Irgun and the Stern Gang were in negotiations once again with the Haganah. However, this was based on poor intelligence, as representatives of each group met only to discuss a recent British offensive operation, not to plan a coordinated response.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> TNA CO 537/3869: Weekly Intelligence Reports 1948.

<sup>75</sup> Charters, *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-7*, 47.

<sup>76</sup> TNA WO 275/58: Sixth Airborne Division, Intelligence Summary 35. 21 March 1947.

<sup>77</sup> Italics added. As cited in Hoffman, *Anonymous Soldiers*, 178.

<sup>78</sup> TNA FO 371/61768: Cunningham to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1 December 1945.

<sup>79</sup> See Wagner, “British Intelligence and the Jewish Resistance Movement in the Palestine Mandate, 1945–46.”

Ultimately, this perceived connection made British officials skeptical that a negotiated settlement could be reached with the insurgents. Correspondence between Cunningham and the Secretary of State for the Colonies provides compelling evidence of this claim given the former was an advocate earlier in the conflict for a political settlement. In February 1946, Cunningham wrote, “There are increasing signs that the Jewish leaders would accept partition as a solution though any solution would probably not result in an easing of the tension for it is the extremist tail that wags the dog.”<sup>80</sup> The failure of any agreement to bring all three insurgent groups in line ultimately militated against compromise.

In the end, the real deliberation amongst British decision makers was whether or not to officially impose martial law. And, despite an initial attempt that led to severe reprisal attacks from Irgun and the Stern Gang, the Cabinet still expressed a strong preference that it be reinstated as quickly as possible across the whole of the territory of Mandatory Palestine.<sup>81</sup> Such calls were eventually tempered by the War Office, which feared another backlash from insurgent groups.

While martial law was not reinstated, British security forces did adhere to a policy of intensified and continuous military pressure against terrorists throughout the country until their final withdrawal in 1948.<sup>82</sup> Lt. Col. Henry Hamilton Van Straubensee dramatically captures in his memoirs the eagerness with which British forces eventually departed: “That really ends the story of my time in the Holy Land. I think I was much more relieved to get away from there than either Italy or even from Dunkirk.”<sup>83</sup>

To summarize, British decision makers exhibited a reluctance to negotiate with the Stern Gang because they inferred the group had maximalist objectives. In this case, the British never saw a bargained solution with Stern Gang members as a viable option. This reluctance also complicated the broader peace talks between the British and Jewish Agency. Because the British remained suspicious of the link between all three insurgent groups, they failed to see even secular Zionist groups as credible partners. The link between Haganah and the Stern Gang is not the only reason that negotiations failed in this case. But, it played a larger role than past analysis suggests.

### 3.6 Alternative Explanations

The previous section offers reasonable evidence to support my claim that British strategic culture militated against a compromised solution in this conflict. However, the conventional wisdom that insurgents alone drive conflict intractability points to at least four alternative factors that may have influenced British strategic preferences for coercion over negotiation.

The first option is that British authorities accurately evaluated the threat posed by the Stern Gang and responded rationally. Despite its smaller size and weaker organizational capacity, the Stern Gang could have attacked more frequently or been more effective at committing acts of violence. This would undermine the claim that the British were needlessly

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<sup>80</sup> TNA FO 371/61768: Cunningham to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 19 February 1946.

<sup>81</sup> Previously, it was applied to only a select number of areas where the insurgents were known to operate. Several military officers, including Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff General Sir Frank Simpson, also supported this idea.

<sup>82</sup> Hoffman, *Anonymous Soldiers*, 397.

<sup>83</sup> Liddell Hart Military Archives, GB0099 KCLMA: Personal papers of Col. Henry Hamilton Van Straubensee.

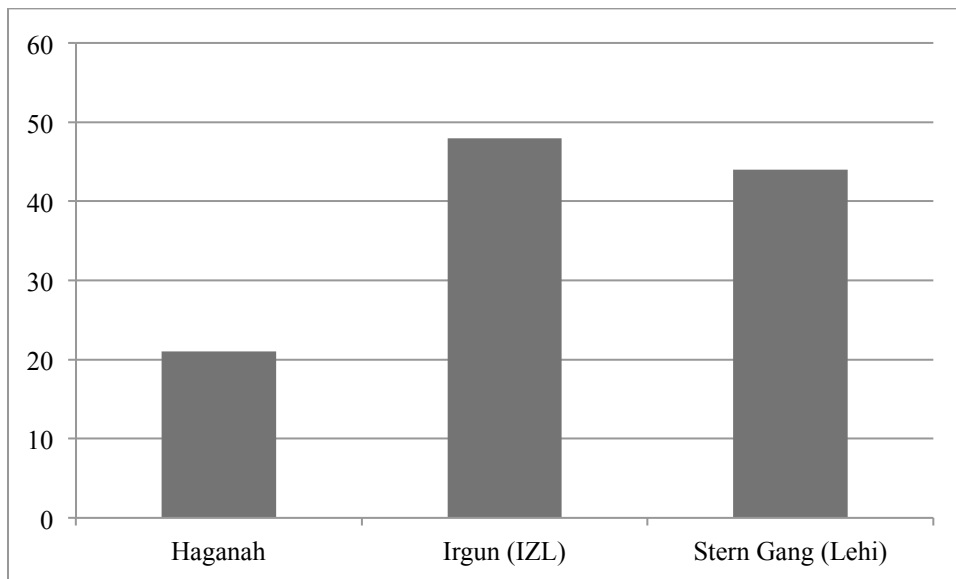
fixated on the short-term consequences of Stern Gang attacks. And, it would be in line with the conventional wisdom that religious ideas and practices increase insurgents' resolve and lethality.<sup>84</sup>

It is true that British authorities often claimed that the Stern Gang was more skilled and ruthless than their Haganah or Irgun counterparts as discussed above. And, at least one source does suggest that the Stern Gang punched well above its weight, inflicting casualties and damage out of proportion to its size.<sup>85</sup>

Yet, there are reasons to remain skeptical that the frequency and intensity of Stern Gang attacks alone shaped their assessments. Compiling data from all available Fortnightly Newsletters distributed by HQ Palestine between November 1945 and May 1948, I find that Irgun and Stern Gang violence was comparable. When one disaggregates "joint" attacks from those attributed to one or more specific insurgent groups, the difference between Irgun and the Stern Gang dissolves. The British, for instance, recorded roughly the same number of major attacks for each group (See Figure 3.1).

In addition, the Stern Gang was no more lethal than its counterparts. If anything, Irgun was responsible for more casualties over the course of the conflict (See Figure 3.2).<sup>86</sup> This should not be particularly surprising. They, after all, conducted the most extreme attack of the conflict, the King David Hotel bombing in July 1946. That major incident aside, insurgent attacks for any group rarely resulted in more than two or three deaths and fewer than a dozen casualties. These lives were, of course, insignificant. However, compared to more recent conflicts, the intensity of violence was quite low.

**Figure 3.1: Attacks by Insurgent Organizations in Mandatory Palestine, 1945 – 48**

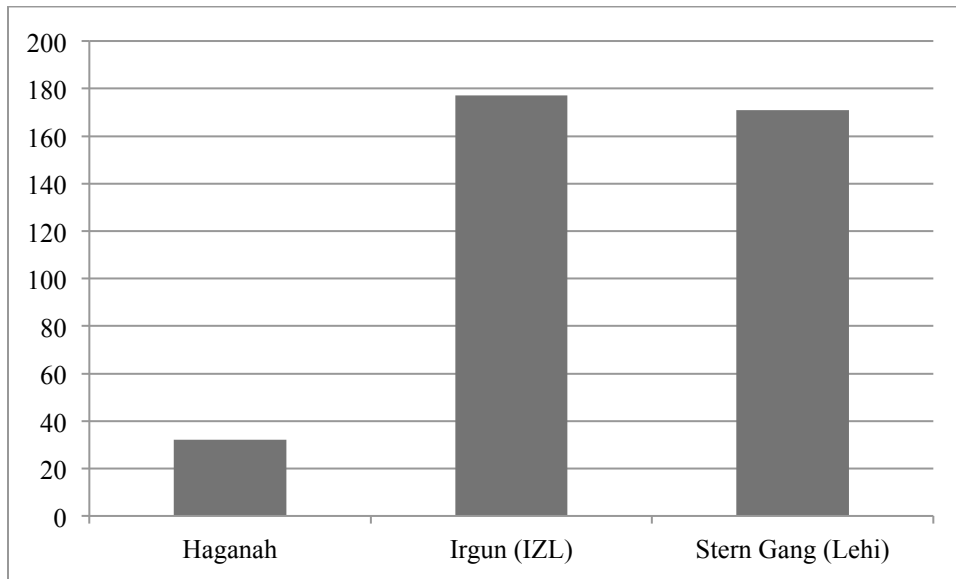


<sup>84</sup> See for example, Barbara F. Walter, "The Extremist's Advantage in Civil Wars," *International Security* 42, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 7–39.

<sup>85</sup> Charters, *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-7*, 49.

<sup>86</sup> These figures do not include attacks in which the Stern Gang was also implicated with Irgun.

**Figure 3.2: Casualties Inflicted by Insurgent Organizations in Mandatory Palestine, 1945 – 48**



A second possibility related to the conventional wisdom is that British intransigence towards the Stern Gang may have more to do with its targets, rather than lethality. The assassination of British officers was one primary tactic of the group, which could explain the sharp distaste for this organization compared to the Haganah and Irgun. Such views may have contributed to the tendency to see the Stern Gang as more hostile, but there is reason to doubt the effect would have been as strong without the religious dimension.

As mentioned previously, the Haganah, Irgun, and Stern Gang worked closely together for the first year and a half of the conflict. In addition, following the dismantling of the Jewish Resistance Movement, Irgun and the Stern Gang continued to coordinate attacks and share intelligence. Finally, the Stern Gang was not alone in killing British officers. Irgun also frequently conducted attacks that resulted in British officers' deaths, including a 1947 hanging of three British officers.

A third, possibility is that the Stern Gang had stronger resolve and cohesion than the other groups. This would support theories that point to the means mechanism of religion. It is true that both the Haganah and Irgun experienced group fragmentation, and the Stern Gang did not. It is also the case that the Stern Gang was tight knit at the start. Members were grouped in cells of three with vertical lines of communication and command from the central committee. Recruitment was selective and prospective members were subject to periods of covert surveillance before their admittance.<sup>87</sup>

However, this was not based on any religious directive. Furthermore, much of the Stern Gang's initial organization drew from a Marxist-Leninist interpretation meant to appeal to the Soviet Union. This would eventually lead to disputes within the group about its mixed, ideological direction. Even if the group was more cohesive than the others, this is not because religious beliefs and practices weeded out free riders and indoctrinated members.

A fourth, and final, possibility is that while the Stern Gang was not militarily effective, it may have merely been intransigent itself. If the Stern Gang did not want to compromise because

<sup>87</sup> Golan, *Stern*.



they were fighting for an indivisible good, the British may have felt they had no choice but to fight.

Again, there is limited evidence to support this conclusion. First, it is the case that the two secular Zionist groups were much clearer about whether they would accept a bargained solution. The Haganah would and thought violence should be used only to the extent it improved their bargaining position. The Irgun rejected any political settlement.<sup>88</sup>

The Stern Gang, in contrast, was not explicit on this point. Its political program was abstruse at times. However, following the death of its founder in 1943 and their eventual split with Irgun, the group focused increasingly on sabotaging British military bases and oil refineries. This was because they believed the British remained in Mandatory Palestine only to preserve their security and economic interests.<sup>89</sup> The Stern Gang did not necessarily take peaceful cooperation off the table. The British, however, did not see it this way. They never invited the insurgent group to the table.

In sum, four potential factors might explain the British preference for military force over negotiation according to the conventional wisdom on religious conflict intractability. None receive much support in this case. Connecting these findings to the previously discussed process tracing tests, it is clear that the conventional wisdom fails two straw-in-the-wind assessments. The frequency and intensity of violence by religious groups would affirm the relevance of those theories, but their absence does not eliminate them. In contrast, the latter two possibilities are more stringent, hoop test. Failing these casts much stronger doubt on the conventional wisdom since they are necessary mechanisms that those theories purport drive the protracted nature of religious civil wars. The Stern Gang was not driven by the means or motivations mechanism asserted by other theories that try to explain the protracted nature of religious conflict. Rather, in the case of Mandatory Palestine, British perceptions presented and magnified the view that the Stern Gang was “rabid and hysterical”, and, consequently, no negotiation could be pursued until the extremists had been eliminated.

### 3.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented evidence from the Jewish insurgency in Mandatory Palestine to illustrate the empirical utility of my theoretical framework. The comparison of British response to secular and religious insurgent groups provides robust support for the idea that states can play a role in obstructing the peaceful settlement of civil wars due to their strategic culture. Most notably, I employed process tracing to demonstrate how correspondence bias influenced British decision makers’ threat assessments and strategic preferences towards coercion, rather than compromise.

Despite the British having reasonable evidence that the Stern Gang posed the least significant threat because of their size and disorganization, officials fixated on the consequences of that group alone. In addition, they inferred that the Stern Gang, but not the Haganah or Irgun, would stop at nothing to achieve its goals. The specific pieces of evidence offered in support of these claims pass three of the four empirical tests outlined at the start of this chapter. Table 3.3 below summarizes the CPOs that apply to each.

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<sup>88</sup> Charters, *The British Army and Jewish Insurgency in Palestine, 1945-7*, 48.

<sup>89</sup> Charters, 50.

**Table 3.3: Causal Process Observations for the Jewish Insurgency**

<b>Observation</b>	<b>Straw-in-the Wind Test (Some Support)</b>	<b>Hoop Test (Strong support)</b>	<b>Smoking Gun Test (Strongest Support)</b>
<i>Actual or suspected religious violence</i>	The Stern Gang had a stated religious objective and the British focused on its religious characteristics.	-	-
<i>Religious insurgents not motivated by maximalist objective</i>	-	The Stern Gang fought to evict the British, but they did not have a policy of “total war”.	-
<i>Officials fixate on short-term consequences</i>	The British emphasized the damage caused by the Stern Gang.		-
<i>Officials infer maximalist objectives</i>	-	The Stern Gang was construed as rabid and zealous after attacks.	-
<i>Officials demonstrate reluctance to compromise</i>	-	-	Stated British reluctance to negotiate with the Stern Gang due to the group’s inferred goals.

The conventional wisdom that insurgents drive the intractability of religious conflicts receives less support in this case. The Stern Gang does not stand out as more active, more destructive, or more intransigent than the secular Zionist groups, especially Irgun. The fact that the British perceived this to be the case supports my argument that religious violence obscures the policy objectives of insurgent groups. Similar to the Haganah and Irgun, the Stern Gang fought to achieve larger political goals. However, the British inferred that this was not what really drove the religious Zionist group to fight. Instead, they saw the Stern Gang as rabid and hysterical; a reactionary group that sought only to tear down the current political order. As predicted by my theory, this made the British less likely to consider a negotiated settlement to the conflict. Even in the face of mixed results, the British did not veer from their policy of military force. Rather, they held firm to this option in the face of a progressively deteriorating situation.

To conclude, the conflict in Mandatory Palestine provides preliminary evidence that the intractability of religious conflict can be driven by policymakers’ perceptions of religion and their refusal to compromise with groups that mobilize along these lines. This is far from an isolated event, however. Less than a decade later and 500 kilometres across the Mediterranean Sea, the British would face another uprising with considerable religious elements. And, they would respond in a strikingly similar manner.

## Chapter 4

### Cyprus Emergency (1955 – 59): Fighting EOKA on the Enchanted Island

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Before abruptly dismissing the U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom from an August 1956 meeting, Ivone Kirkpatrick curtly avowed he would “sooner negotiate with the terrorist Grivas” than Archbishop Makarios III.<sup>1</sup> The American representative, Winthrop Aldrich, had met with the Head of the Foreign Office in the hope of persuading him not to make public the “Grivas diaries.” These were the personal memoirs of the Cypriot rebel leader, which British security forces had recovered from insurgent hideouts earlier that summer. They provided undeniable evidence that the head of the Church of Cyprus was deeply involved in the rebellion that started in April 1955.

Aldrich, and his colleagues in Washington, feared the publication of this information would only make conciliation efforts on the island more difficult. They were correct in more ways than they knew. The British didn’t just publish the diaries. The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Alan Lennox-Boyd, also took the unusual step of doing so on a Sunday. His choice was deliberate, hoping to rub home the point of exposing a spiritual leader on the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup>

This episode powerfully captures the tense relationship that persisted between various British government officials and the Archbishop throughout Emergency Period on Cyprus. It is also representative of the more general anxiety British security forces displayed towards the most overt religious opponents they would face in the postwar period.

The insurgency in Cyprus pitted colonial security forces against the National Organisation of Cypriot Struggle, known chiefly by its acronym of EOKA.<sup>3</sup> Much has been written about the nationalist motivations of this group, but substantial religious dynamics also characterized their mobilization, organizational structure, and conduct. They were led, for instance, by a charismatic religious leader and benefited from the financial resources of the Cypriot Orthodox Church. EOKA also drew heavily on religious beliefs, symbols, and rituals.<sup>4</sup> For example, they were inspired by a commitment to Hellenism, an ideology with important religious elements. And, they developed a cult of martyrs that sacralized their fallen fighters.

In this chapter, I explore how British officials interpreted and responded to these religious dynamics. The insurgency started on April 1, 1955 with a series of attacks on colonial government buildings in Nicosia, Limassol, and Larnaca. Pamphlets issued in the name of “Dighenis”, a legendary Greek hero, and EOKA littered the vicinity of the various bombings.<sup>5</sup> They called on the Cypriot people to rise up to achieve “Enosis and only Enosis”, or the political union of Cyprus with Greece. Attacks on police stations and personnel soon followed. And as the

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<sup>1</sup> TNA FO 371/123921: Kirkpatrick minute, 27 August 1956.

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 152.

<sup>3</sup> This is a standard translation of the organization’s full name, which in Greek was Εθνική Οργάνωσις Κυπρίων Αγωνιστών.

<sup>4</sup> David French, *Fighting EOKA: The British Counter-Insurgency Campaign on Cyprus, 1955-1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 67.

<sup>5</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Revolt*, 52.

scale of the violence escalated, the British press began to refer to the once “enchanted island” as “terror island”.<sup>6</sup>

Colonial officials were caught totally unawares when EOKA first struck in April 1955.<sup>7</sup> They suspected that some sort of violent resistance might be forthcoming, but they expected it to take the spontaneous form it had in the 1930s. Consequently, it would take several months before they fully appreciated the seriousness of the organized insurgency. A State of Emergency was finally declared on 26 November 1955. This lasted until 1959 when agreements were signed in London and Zurich that granted Cyprus its independence.

Similar to the previous chapter, I employ process tracing to show as explicitly as possible the link between British decision makers’ general beliefs about religion and their strategic preferences over the course of the conflict. I draw extensively on primary documents from the War, Colonial, Foreign, and Foreign and Commonwealth Office files related to Cyprus and housed today at The National Archives in London. Documents from other repositories in the United Kingdom and the Cypriot State Archives also provided background context for my analysis.<sup>8</sup>

At first glance, the case of Cyprus may seem an odd choice to test my argument since a peace agreement resolved the conflict after only five years. The length and resolution of the Emergency Period does not seem to match the type of intractable conflicts that worry contemporary analysts. However, my interest is not in the final policy outcome, but the strategic preferences of counterinsurgent forces. What is important in this case is that the British resisted and even undermined negotiation efforts throughout most of the conflict. The compromise that was eventually reached came after much delay and heavy international pressure, especially from Greece, Turkey, and the United States. In the absence of this pressure, it is likely that the conflict would have persisted due, in no small part, to British intransigence.

The Cyprus Emergency is a useful theory for testing my argument for at least two other reasons. First, similar to the case of Mandatory Palestine, the conventional wisdom does not provide a compelling explanation for the outcome of this case. As I will demonstrate, EOKA members mobilized along religious lines, but they remained committed to the cause more from fear of reprisal attacks and execution at the hands of their confreres than due to religious beliefs. Furthermore, they did eventually compromise on their objectives by accepting independence, rather than union with Greece.

Second, the case of Cyprus affords the opportunity for cross-temporal, within-case analysis because the saliency of religion for government officials varied over the course of the conflict. The British were suspicious of the Greek Cypriot Orthodox community from the start, but they did not confirm the Church’s involvement until 15 months into the rebellion with the discovery of the above-mentioned Grivas diaries. This delay provides the opportunity to compare British views and preferences both before and after confirmation of the Church’s involvement.

According to my argument, British officials’ correspondence bias should exert a progressively stronger influence over the course of the conflict. This is due to both the increasing saliency of religion and the general unfamiliarity of British decision makers with the Orthodox Church of Cyprus. Orthodox groups played a minor role in the United Kingdom prior to the mid-twentieth century, and the British Empire had limited experience governing territories with an

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<sup>6</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Revolt*, 81.

<sup>7</sup> The Government buildings attacked on 1 April 1955 were not even guarded, for example.

<sup>8</sup> These archives include the Imperial War Museum, the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at King’s College London, and the Bodleian Libraries at Oxford University.

Orthodox majority. The commonly held view of Orthodox Christianity, with its perceived mixing of religion and politics, is well summarized by the preeminent British historian William Miller in his classic study of the modern Greek state: “If few Eastern politicians are religious men, nearly all Eastern Churchmen are politicians.”<sup>9</sup>

This view did not change much into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. While the British had official control of Cyprus since 1878, it was not officially annexed into the British Empire until 1914. Even then, it was under a military administration until 1924, when it became a crown colony. And, despite some efforts by colonial officials to cooperate with religious leaders, contact was for the most part rare and strained. The last major effort to encourage more interaction between the two socio-political forces on the island was made by Ronald Storrs, Governor of Cyprus from 1926 until 1932. However, these efforts met with a fair deal of resistance. For instance, after one particularly awkward meeting between colonial and religious leaders, one officer remarked, “If I might suggest, Sir, no more mixed tea parties.”<sup>10</sup>

British officials continued to be uncomfortable and unfamiliar with Eastern orthodoxy right up to the start of the rebellion. A 1955 *Observer* newspaper article captures this persistent sentiment: “The British tradition is for churchmen to keep out of politics. But in the secular struggle of Greek and Turk in the Levant, to which Cypriot Enosis is an epilogue, religion and politics have been closely linked.”<sup>11</sup> The overlap between religion and politics would continue to annoy and puzzle British officials throughout the conflict.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds in five parts. In the first section, I provide a brief background of the conflict. I am, of course, not the first to note the missteps of British officials in Cyprus. A number of analysts have pointed to the role of inept and jaundiced colonial administrators, a dysfunctional local police force, and foreign policy blunders.<sup>12</sup> Others have emphasized structural factors, like modernization and ethnic cleavages, along with weak colonial institutions.<sup>13</sup> There is no shortage of blame for British failures in Cyprus.

What this chapter adds is an appreciation for how the religious dynamics of the conflict also militated against compromise. By highlighting the role of religion, I, of course, do not mean to give the impression that it is the only reason for the protracted nature of the conflict. Other political, security, economic, and diplomatic factors, of course, mattered. Rather, my aim is to show that British perceptions of religion are an important, although overlooked, factor that help explain why security forces dismissed the possibility of a political settlement and clung to a policy of repression despite its inefficacy.

In the second section, I highlight the pervasive role of religion both prior and during the conflict. The Cypriot Orthodox Church held a privileged position in society and was deeply involved in politics. Religious imagery and practices were woven into the fabric of everyday life

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<sup>9</sup> William Miller, *A History of the Greek People: 1821-1921* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1924), 281.

<sup>10</sup> Ronald Storrs, *Orientalisms* (London: I. Nicholson & Watson, 1937), 700.

<sup>11</sup> TNA CO 926/447/159: Archbishop Makarios, 1955.

<sup>12</sup> Alexis Rappas, *Cyprus in the 1930s: British Colonial Rule and the Roots of the Cyprus Conflict* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2014); David M. Anderson, “Policing and Communal Conflict: The Cyprus Emergency, 1954–60,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 21, no. 3 (September 1, 1993): 177–207; Panagiotis Dimitrakis, “British Intelligence and the Cyprus Insurgency, 1955–1959,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 21, no. 2 (February 13, 2008): 375–94.

<sup>13</sup> Paul W. T. Kingston, *Britain and the Politics of Modernization in the Middle East, 1945-1958* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Adamantia Pollis, “Intergroup Conflict and British Colonial Policy: The Case of Cyprus,” *Comparative Politics* 5, no. 4 (1973): 575–99; Leonard W. Doob, “Cypriot Patriotism and Nationalism,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 30, no. 2 (1986): 383–96; Nadav Morag, “Cyprus and the Clash of Greek and Turkish Nationalisms,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 10, no. 4 (January 1, 2004): 595–624.

on the island. And, confessional identities were a defining point of contrast between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish communities. It is, unsurprising, then that those who rose up against the British drew on religious beliefs, symbols, and rituals in no small measure. This widespread influence would also not escape British notice.

In the third section, I demonstrate that correspondence bias served as an important lens through which government and military officials interpreted the conflict. The British were not ignorant of the Church's role in Cypriot society, or its potential to foment unrest. In contrast, they made a considerable, if not always systematic, effort to obtain information about religious activities in the country. This included heavy surveillance of local clergy, monasteries suspected of hiding weapons, and recruitment campaigns from religious youth organizations. The interpretation of this information reveals that the British fixated on the consequences of EOKA activities and inferred the group, especially the Archbishop, would stop at nothing to achieve its ideological objective.

In the fourth section, I consider whether other theories for religious conflict intractability can explain British intransigence. Neither the means nor the motivation mechanism provides much analytic leverage. Religion was more of a background condition, rather than driving force for EOKA. It shaped some of their activities, but so too did nationalist and materialist factors. What is interesting is that the British attributed more influence to the religious dimensions than may have been the case.

The fifth, and final, section summarizes the key pieces of evidence from this case that support my theoretical framework. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that correspondence bias was an influential lens – one that sharpened, as the Church's involvement became more obvious – through which British government and military officials interpreted the conflict. As a consequence, they progressively doubted whether a political settlement could successfully bring an end to the fighting. And, even though a peace agreement was reached, it was accomplished in spite of, not because of, British strategic preferences.

## 4.2 Conflict Background

The rebellion that broke out in Cyprus in April 1955 was in many ways the latest episode of a resistance to imperial rule that dated back more than a century. As early as 1821, calls for overthrowing Ottoman rule and joining with the newly independent Greek state found voice on the island. These desires were fueled by a newly independent Greek state and its policy of enosis. This ideology called for the inclusion of all Greek-speaking members of the Orthodox Church within the boundaries of the former Byzantine Empire.

Appeals to the Pan-Hellenistic ideology of enosis did not diminish when the island was transferred from Ottoman to British control in 1878.<sup>14</sup> If anything, the anti-imperial sentiment gained further traction, especially after the island was formally declared the Crown colony of British Cyprus in 1925.<sup>15</sup> In 1928, for example, Greek Cypriots protested celebrations of the

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<sup>14</sup> Cyprus first became a protectorate of the United Kingdom in 1878. This was a result of the Congress of Berlin, which brought a formal end to the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878). The Ottoman Empire retained sovereignty over the island until 1914, when Great Britain formally annexed the island and governed it under a military administration. In 1925, the island was proclaimed a crown colony.

<sup>15</sup> Ioannis Stefanidis, *Stirring the Greek Nation: Political Culture, Irredentism and Anti-Americanism in Post-War Greece, 1945–1967* (Burlington, VT: Routledge, 2007), 17–18.

fifteenth anniversary of the British occupation of Cyprus. And, in 1931, 5,000 Greek Cypriots demonstrated in the streets of Nicosia and, eventually, burnt down Government House.<sup>16</sup>

The British swiftly responded to these and other demonstrations with punitive measures, especially compared to policies during the prior two decades. The alleged leaders of the riots, including two Bishops, were deported, and the Greek consul, who was believed to have encouraged the unrest, was expelled.<sup>17</sup> A new law declared it seditious for anyone to advocate a change in the sovereignty of the island. It became illegal to fly the Greek flag, or to ring church bells except at times of regular church services. And, the 1882 constitution was also dissolved; colonial governors were to rule the island by decree until the British departure in 1960.

By the mid-1950s, calls for enosis once again gained traction. However, unlike in prior decades, opposition forces now benefited from clear leadership and organization. Archbishop Makarios III, in particular, came to serve as the primary figurehead of the movement. He served as a charismatic leader and consummate politician.

Elected head of the Cypriot Orthodox Church in 1950 at the age of 37, he inherited a religious institution that was becoming steadily more involved in politics. His predecessor, for example, created the Ethnarchy Council that combined the leadership of nationalist groups with that of the Church.

Makarios III pushed further. He consolidated his religious authority and squashed dissent within the Church. He also expanded his political influence by reorganizing the Ethnarchy Council so that he had the final say on all decisions. This made him the *de facto* leader of the entire Greek Cypriot community.<sup>18</sup>

Makarios also founded an insurgent movement. In 1952, during one of his periodic visits to Athens, he established what came to be known as the Liberation Committee.<sup>19</sup> He served as its chairman and political leader. At that time, he also recruited a retired Colonel of the Greek army, Georgios Grivas to lead its military wing. The two men worked closely over the next two years to prepare for an armed rebellion using Church resources to finance and smuggle arms on to the island.

Once the rebellion began in April 1955, Makarios and Grivas corresponded from a distance. Grivas preferred to stay with his men in their cave hideouts located in the Troodos Mountains. Through a sophisticated courier system that relied on both youth and women to transfer messages, he coordinated EOKA attacks across the island. Individual guerrilla cells of no more than ten men would carry out these activities, along with conspirators – often teenagers – embedded in the main towns. The latter often conducted sabotage operations until they were discovered, after which time they too would retreat to the mountains. The soft targets of these attacks were typically electricity transformers, water pipelines, telephone lines, bridges, and unguarded public buildings. The primary aim here was to convince the local population that the British could not deliver on their promises.

In addition to sabotage, the other primary tactic of EOKA was assassinations. Similar to Irgun and the Stern Gang in Mandatory Palestine, EOKA focused primarily on members of the local police services. At first, policemen and known police informers received anonymous

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<sup>16</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Revolt*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 50.

<sup>18</sup> Maria Hadjipolycarpou, “The Nation of Saints: The National Theological Rhetoric of Archbishop Makarios III (1913–1977),” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 33, no. 1 (May 13, 2015): 134-35.

<sup>19</sup> Stanley Mayes, *Makarios: A Biography* (New York: MacMillan Press, 1981), 49-50.

threats, telling them to resign or face the consequences.<sup>20</sup> Those that did not, especially Greek Cypriots, were considered fair game. For example, between 30 June and 31 August 1955, EOKA mounted no fewer than five separate assassination attempts against Greek Cypriot members of Special Branch in Nicosia and Famagusta.<sup>21</sup>

While EOKA was well organized and enjoyed substantial support from the local population, it was far from a specialized fighting force. It was never comprised of more than a few hundred fighters. And, it suffered from both a shortage of weapons and an even greater shortage of people who knew how to use them.<sup>22</sup> EOKA members were mainly equipped with small arms, including rifles, shot guns, and rudimentary forms of improvised explosive devices.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, they relied on basic guerrilla tactics throughout the conflict, especially sabotage, assassinations, and hit-and-run attacks that sought to wear down, rather than defeat, British forces. These efforts made life difficult for colonial officials, but it never seriously threatened to overthrow the colonial government.

If this wasn't enough of a disadvantage, EOKA also operated on a shoestring budget. Documents recovered by British security forces in 1957 suggest that the insurgent organization spent a mere £1,540 per month.<sup>24</sup> These funds were provided directly from the Cypriot Orthodox Church.<sup>25</sup>

Where EOKA had the advantage, however, was in the arena of propaganda. Through a near constant stream of leaflets and flyers, the insurgent organization promoted their cause and discredited the British. This included the efforts of a high-ranking EOKA member, Archimandrite Constantinos Lefkosiatis, charged with developing a "spiritual supply service" for its ranks.<sup>26</sup> These materials often appealed to the core of the Cypriot ethos by comparing British Governor Harding to the Anti-Christ. One 1957 leaflet, for instance, read, "The antichrist satrap of Cyprus continues desecrating that which is sacred and holy to us. Since he got here, to impose through violence lawlessness and disorder, he hits like a mania and insults whatever relates to our religion and the Church."<sup>27</sup> In one paragraph, this flyer both advances the cause of enosis by referencing provincial governors (i.e., satraps) of the Hellenistic empires and emphasizes the threat posed by the British to the Cypriot faith.<sup>28</sup> In addition to this steady stream of pamphlets, the *Political Committee of the Cyprus Struggle* (PEKA) also issued materials extolling the

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<sup>20</sup> TNA FCO 141/3709: Dighenis, To the Police, 30 June 1955.

<sup>21</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 73.

<sup>22</sup> Early members, for instance, were carefully selected and trained in Crete prior to the conflict, but later recruits were mainly young schoolboys.

<sup>23</sup> At the conclusion of the conflict, Grivas boasted his group had defeated the British despite never having at one time more than a hundred automatic weapons, and 500–600 shotguns. These figures are probably embellished, but the general point holds. EOKA was a relatively small insurgent organization with limited firepower. Georgios Grivas, *General Grivas on Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Praeger, 1965).

<sup>24</sup> TNA WO 33/2736: History of EOKA, 1954–1959, 20 Apr 1960.

<sup>25</sup> Makarios III directly transferred this fund until his deportation. The Bishop of Kitium then assumed these duties. Later he was replaced with an unidentified paymaster.

<sup>26</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 67.

<sup>27</sup> TNA FCO 141/3711/166/57: EOKA Leaflets, 1957. See also Cyprus State Archives SA1:1011/1955/III: Weekly Summary of Cyprus Press, 1956–1957.

<sup>28</sup> Satraps were initially the governors in the ancient Median and Achaemenid Empires of Persia. They continued to be used in successor political territories, such as the Hellenistic empires from 323 BCE to the emergence of the Roman Empire.



memory of dead fighters and organized memorial services for them in churches across the island.<sup>29</sup>

The central mouthpiece for EOKA and the cause of *enosis*, of course, was the Archbishop. In contrast to Grivas' stationary position in the Troodos Mountains, Makarios spent the first year of the conflict crisscrossing the island. Visiting a different village each week, he preached incessantly against British occupation and in favor of union with Greece. One British journalist in 1955 describes the scene of one of these sermons as follows:

His message on these occasions is always the same. 'Cyprus has known many conquerors in the past. Now it is face-to-face with the last of its conquerors. Your Church has preserved the flame of religion and nationalism through all these centuries. It will lead you to liberty and deliver you from foreign rule.'<sup>30</sup>

Other clergy on the island were directed to preach a similar message. And, high-ranking officials like the Bishops of Kyrenia and Kitium, down to local priests were only too eager to comply.

Makarios, of course, did more than spread the gospel of *enosis*. He also served as the main interlocutor with the British. Due to his position on the Ethnarchy Council, colonial officials understood that any deal that was to be accepted by the Greek Cypriot community must first go through the Archbishop. To this end, Governor John Harding entered into a series of talks with Makarios starting in October 1955.

Harding arrived on the island at the start of that month believing, or at least hoping, that it would be possible to reach a negotiated settlement.<sup>31</sup> Underpinning his hopes was the view that EOKA represented a minority view, and that once it had been eliminated most Greek Cypriots would be willing to collaborate with the British. This was not a view shared widely in London. Yet, Prime Minister Eden had faith in Harding's ability. The appointed Governor had previously served as an advisor on the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya and, subsequently, served on Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Harding was, thus, seen as an experienced, levelheaded official that could swiftly restore order.

The talks, however, would go nowhere. As the opening anecdote to this study illustrated, others in the British government inferred that the Archbishop was not negotiating in good faith. In particular, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Alan Lennox-Boyd, believed the meetings were only useful in so much as they could later be used to illustrate the Archbishop's intransigence. They eventually led to Makarios' deportation from the island.

While the removal of the Archbishop was controversial at the time, the capture of the Grivas diaries during the summer of 1956 confirmed for most officials that they had made the correct decision. Those documents provided ample evidence of the Archbishop's connection to EOKA. They contained information about his involvement in the group's founding and its operational planning, including the selection of targets.<sup>32</sup> And, while an equal amount of information incriminated Grivas, the British government only used the diaries to discredit the religious cleric.

British strategic preferences shifted even more decidedly towards military force around

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<sup>29</sup> TNA CO 926/671: Reports by Cyprus Intelligence Committee (fortnightly reviews), 1957; TNA CO 926/672. Reports by Cyprus Intelligence Committee (fortnightly reviews), 1957.

<sup>30</sup> "Profile: Bishop Makarios," *Observer*, 28 Aug 1955. As cited in French, *Fighting EOKA*, 40.

<sup>31</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 93.

<sup>32</sup> TNA FCO 141/4225: Cyprus: Captured documents, Grivas Diaries, etc., 1956 -1959.

this time, as well. Even Harding came to support a policy of attrition, concluding that the only feasible way to ensure British interests was to focus on eliminating or capturing EOKA members.<sup>33</sup> By providing security on the island, he and other colonial officials determined they might win over the local Greek Cypriot community, or at the very least convince them to cooperate with the better of two alternatives.

Harding would not stick around to see if this change in policy was effective, however. Field Marshall Sir Hugh Foot replaced him in December of 1957. This signaled more than anything a British commitment to an enemy-centric counterinsurgency policy focused on eliminating the enemy and achieving legitimacy by providing security. Even as EOKA attacks decreased, British operations went into high gear. Cordon-and-search operations occurred more frequently and new detention camps were soon erected to handle the increasing number of captured suspects. Unsurprisingly, this led to a renewed insurgent violence. And, eventually a stalemate was reached, one that finally brought the British back to the negotiating table.

The London and Zurich Agreements, which brought a formal end to the insurgency, were signed in February 1959 between Turkey, Greece, the United Kingdom, and Cypriot community leaders (both Greek Cypriot and Turkish). Many British officials expressed reluctance to the end. However, Prime Minister MacMillan overruled this opposition and agreed to a political settlement that he felt safeguarded the country's minimal strategic interest. His decision to accept the bargained solution was not because he or other officials had some change of heart regarding Makarios or EOKA. Rather, it took away the opportunity for opposition leaders to criticize the Conservative Party in upcoming elections. And, MacMillan primarily hashed out the agreement with Greece and Turkey, not interlocutors on the island. In the end, he determined that if the British were going to lose the island, they would do it in the way that best suited British interests.<sup>34</sup> EOKA accepted this compromise in which Cyprus achieved independence, rather than union with Greece.

What role did British perceptions of religious violence play in this shift in strategic preferences? To what extent did the mixing of religion and politics demoralize British officials' faith in peace talks? And, in what ways did it contribute to an increased preference for military force? In the subsequent two sections, I detail the religious components of the Cyprus Emergency and the British response to these dynamics, respectively.

### 4.3 Religious Dynamics

Religion did not serve as the cause of the rebellion in Cyprus, but it did significantly shape the organization and conduct of EOKA. Four religious dynamics stand out as particularly important: ideology, spiritual authority, informal rituals, and confessional identity.

The first concerns EOKA's ostensible reason for fighting. As mentioned previously, the struggle in Cyprus centered on the call for enosis, or the political union of Cyprus with Greece. This ideology emerged in the early nineteenth century with the establishment of an independent Greek state. It called for the incorporation of all lands with a majority ethnic Greek population into one political unit. And, prior to Cyprus, a number of islands in the Mediterranean had successfully leveraged enosis to achieve this unification. Great Britain, for instance, transferred

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<sup>33</sup> He also continued to advocate for political and social change, but accepted that a military victory might need to precede any major reforms.

<sup>34</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 300.

sovereignty of the Ionian Islands to Greece in 1864.<sup>35</sup> Crete rebelled against Ottoman rule a few years later using the motto "Crete, Enosis, Freedom or Death". And, while that particular rebellion was not successful, the island was later annexed into the Kingdom of Greece in 1913.<sup>36</sup>

Enosis, therefore, was not unique to Cyprus. Nor was it an ideology that necessarily prevented compromise. For example, the Ottoman Grand Vizier brought an end to the Cretan Revolt of 1866-69 by instituting a new law that granted Christians on the island more control of the local administration.<sup>37</sup> Most of the rebels accepted this concession and laid down their arms.

The Pan-Hellenistic ideology of enosis was not especially theistic, even in Cyprus. If anything, it had more the characteristics of a sectarian, millenarian movement, which anticipated its eschatological salvation as union with Greece.<sup>38</sup> With that said, there were still some religious elements to the ideology. For example, enosis not only called for the territorial union of lands with a majority ethnic Greek population, but it maintained a commitment to all Greek Orthodox adherents living in one state. More importantly, the British focused on the religious, rather than ethnic, ties emphasized by the call for enosis in Cyprus. A 1955 report from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office captures this nicely. It emphasized that enosis was not "ethnological in origin, but is based on the appeal of the Hellenistic culture that came to Cyprus with Christianity in its Greek liturgy."<sup>39</sup> Ethnic ties did link Cyprus to Greece, but it was religion, at least in their eyes, that kept the desire for enosis alive.

In Cyprus, the religious elements may have been further accentuated in the eyes of the British because the Cypriot Orthodox Church was the torchbearer of this cause for over a century. Throughout the period of Ottoman rule the Church defended the Hellenistic identity of the Greek Cypriot community. And, even upon the arrival of the first British High Commissioner, Sir Garnet Wolseley in July 1878, Archbishop Sofronios made clear the aspirations of the Greek Cypriot community to eventually join Greece.<sup>40</sup> Prominent clerics continued to openly support the objectives of EOKA before and during the Emergency Period.

It is this prominent role played by religious leaders and the Church that, therefore, added a second layer of religious dimensions to the conflict. No name is more synonymous with Cypriot resistance than Archbishop Makarios III. He would go on to serve as the first president of the new republic, and his larger than life statue hovers today high above the Troodos Mountains. It faces, not unintentionally, north. Yet, Makarios was only the most recent (and perhaps most well organized) of a long line of clerics to advance the cause of enosis.

The Orthodox Church on Cyprus had been autocephalous since at least the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. This means it had complete control over its internal affairs. It selected its own archbishop, and he governed without accountability to any higher-ranking religious authority. The Archbishop and the Church, consequently, had complete authority over spiritual matters within the Cypriot Orthodox community.

The Church also exercised a considerable degree of power over the temporal needs of the Greek Cypriot community. This is for both historical and institutional reasons. Under the

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<sup>35</sup> They had been a protectorate of Great Britain since the Treaty of Paris in 1815.

<sup>36</sup> This was a de facto annexation by 1908, but was not formally recognized until 1913.

<sup>37</sup> A major military victory at Arkadi also persuaded the insurgents of the Ottoman resolve. Michael Llewellyn Smith, *The Great Island: A Study of Crete* (London: Longmans, 1965), 96.

<sup>38</sup> Demetris Assos, "Conspiracy Theories and the Decolonisation of Cyprus under the Weight of Historical Evidence, 1955 - 1959," *The Cyprus Review* 23, no. 2 (2011): 121.

<sup>39</sup> TNA FCO 141/4161/36: The Power of the Church in Cyprus and the Seditious Activities of the Prelate, 1955.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Holland and Diana Markides, *The British and the Hellenes: Struggles for Mastery in the Eastern Mediterranean 1850-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 167.

Ottoman system, religious communities were largely responsible for their own communal affairs as long as they paid their taxes and did not threaten the political order. The role of the Church in governing the Cypriot Orthodox community became more formalized under British rule with the establishment of the Ethnarchy Council. Through this body, the archbishop served as both the religious and political leader of the flock.<sup>41</sup>

The mixing of religion and politics did not sit well with British authorities. As the two leading institutions on the island, the Greek Church and British colonial state ran more afoul of each other as time went on. This was largely a consequence of both sides trying to exert as much influence as possible. To that end, the British would try at various points to delimit the power of the Church, especially the influence of the Ethnarchy Council. In 1937, for instance, colonial officials passed a statute that would give them more control over future elections to the archiepiscopacy. Not to be outwitted, the Church simply refused to hold elections after the death of Cyril III until the Bishops of Kitium and Kyrenia were returned from exile.<sup>42</sup> The British sought to wrest control from the ecclesiastical hands most through reforms to the education system. The introduction of Boards of Education, for example, was aimed at secularizing and “dehellenizing” school curricula.<sup>43</sup>

A third important religious dynamic to the insurgency on Cyprus in the 1950s was religious practice. These aimed to break down inhibitions about killing by giving religious sanction to both the cause and the orders of EOKA leaders. They were also designed to increase commitment to the group through a format familiar to many members, especially early recruits drawn from two Church-sponsored right-wing youth organizations - Pancyprian National Youth Organisation (PEON) and Orthodox Christian Union (OHEN).<sup>44</sup>

Initiation rites were among the most notable. Each new member of EOKA was required to swear an oath on the Bible before a priest.<sup>45</sup> This pledge included a promise to work for the liberation Cyprus, to sacrifice one’s life if necessary for that cause, to obey one’s leader without question, and never to reveal EOKA’s secrets on pain of death.<sup>46</sup>

Religious symbols and imagery further permeated the organization, especially its propaganda. Leaflets would often open, “In the name of God, the Almighty” and others would depict angels watching over the Cypriot people.<sup>47</sup> Fallen fighters would be described as having marched towards their Golgotha.<sup>48</sup> And, even Makarios’ return from exile was described in religious imagery, being compared to Christ’s entry into Jerusalem at the start of his Passion.<sup>49</sup> Beyond this, the clergy also directly framed the struggle in eschatological terms. The Bishop of Photios, for instance, referred to the achievement of enosis as the equivalent of the “Day of Resurrection.”<sup>50</sup>

In addition, EOKA developed a cult of martyrs. Captured fighters were often portrayed as

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<sup>41</sup> See French, *Fighting EOKA*, 24

<sup>42</sup> They were exiled as a result of riots in 1931, which included the burning of Government House in Nicosia.

<sup>43</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Revolt*, 10

<sup>44</sup> TNA FCO 141/3195: Cyprus: Pancyprian National Youth Organisation (PEON), January 1951 – December 1953. They would later also draw from right-wing farmers’ movements and other student organizations.

<sup>45</sup> TNA 371/117628/1081/224: National Organization of Cypriot Combatants (EOKA): oaths, 1955.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> TNA FCO 141/3378/11: ANE (Youth of EOKA) Leaflets; TNA CO 926/680: PEKA leaflet. 1 April 1955.

<sup>48</sup> TNA CO 926/671/201/57: PEKA leaflets.

<sup>49</sup> TNA CO 926/671: Reports by Cyprus Intelligence Committee (Fortnightly Reviews), 1957-59, Intel review for first half of April 1957.

<sup>50</sup> TNA FO 371/123878/1081/564: Statement by Bishop Photios on deportation.

preferring to become martyrs that divulge information to the British. The Church was the main vehicle for this idea as it celebrated the memory of dead fighters and organized memorial services for them in churches across the island.<sup>51</sup> These fighters, especially those captured and interrogated by the British, were lauded for choosing to die for the cause of enosis, whether that captured the full story or not.<sup>52</sup>

A fourth, and final, religious dynamic to the Cyprus Emergency is perhaps the most obvious. Confessional identities shaped the relationship between EOKA and the local population, especially the division between the majority Greek Christian Cypriot and minority Muslim Turkish communities. In many rural areas, these two populations lived at a distance. But, even in mixed towns and cities, the two groups lived in distinct quarters. Social rituals further reinforced group differences. The Greek Cypriot's life, especially in rural areas, centered on the church services and festivities of baptisms, weddings, funerals, name days, and the panegyri, which honored the Virgin Mary. For Muslim Turks, social life was organized about the mosque and activities like circumcision festivities, weddings, and holidays like Kurban Bayram.<sup>53</sup> Thus, religion set clear social boundaries that served as the main determinant of communal interaction.<sup>54</sup>

EOKA would exploit these divisions, particularly through its propaganda. The insurgent group framed enosis as a collective struggle for Cypriot Orthodox society. They claimed the British were trying to undermine their way of life, portraying the colonial power as both atheists and anti-Christians. This framing was used to draw sharp distinctions between the British and Greek Cypriot population. A 1957 PEKA leaflet, for example, summarized: "The anti-Christians know that religion is the motive power of our people, with it we shall win in our struggle for freedom..."<sup>55</sup>

Individual officials were also often singled out, perhaps no one more than Governor Harding. He was accused of everything from desecrating churches and graves to assassinating church cantors. The most consistent criticism after March of 1956, however, was that Harding arrested "God's representatives from the Archbishop to deacons and monks".<sup>56</sup> EOKA presented this as further evidence that the British sought to undermine the role of the Church on the island.

Because religion played such a pervasive role in the insurgency on Cyprus, British officials could not miss it. A 1958 report by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff represents the consensus view of the colonial administration. It summarized, "[b]oth EOKA, and its political counterpart PEKA, owe their hold on the population very largely to the support of the Church, which provides the brains, the planning, and operates the finance, without which neither organization could function for long."<sup>57</sup>

The Church and its clergy would become an obsession of colonial officials during the Emergency Period. Security forces regularly monitored the preaching of prominent clerics, especially Archbishop Makarios III and the bishops of Kyrenia and Kitium, for "seditious

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<sup>51</sup> TNA CO 926/671: Reports by Cyprus Intelligence Committee (fortnightly reviews), 1957; TNA CO 926/672: Reports by Cyprus Intelligence Committee (fortnightly reviews), 1957.

<sup>52</sup> For examples, see Andreas Varnavas, *A History of the Liberation Struggle of EOKA 1955-1959*, trans. Philippos Stylianou (Nicosia, Cyprus: Foundation of the EOKA Liberation Struggle, 2004).

<sup>53</sup> Christos Ioannides, "Cyprus, British Colonialism and the Seeds of Partition: From Coexistence to Communal Strife," *The Journal of Modern Hellenism* 30 (2014): 41–72.

<sup>54</sup> Christian–Muslim intermarriage was not socially permissible in either community, is another example.

<sup>55</sup> TNA CO 926/946: PEKA Leaflet 21 April 1957.

<sup>56</sup> TNA CO 926/671: PEKA Leaflet 129/57.

<sup>57</sup> TNA DEFE 13/7: Report by Chief of the Imperial General Staff on His Visit to Cyprus, 23 – 27 November 1958.

rhetoric couched in religious language”.<sup>58</sup> A British propaganda document produced after the capture of the Grivas diaries well captures their view of this activity. The chapter dramatically entitled “The Prostitution of Religion” records the following:

The church leaders sought to dragoon their flocks into unquestioning accord with their political adventure by a second process, more subtle than intimidation, more insidious, and with effects more difficult to eradicate... By devoting sermons to politics rather than true religion, a confusion is purposely brought about in the pious mind, a confusion between Christianity and Hellenism.<sup>59</sup>

Over the course of the conflict the British would further agonize over how best to curb this influence. They believed that if they could “attack the political and religious basis of EOKA, we shall in the end reach a settlement.”<sup>60</sup> The general preference of most officials was to detain subversive priests, but a 1955 memo reveals why this was done sparingly. Such measures were considered impractical “because it would lead to serious disturbances and it is doubtful whether they could be here [held] securely in custody.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, even though “The Church and EOKA were synonymous...the Church was immune from Government action. This immunity presented one of the greatest problems of the emergency.”<sup>62</sup>

British officials not only monitored the clergy; they also kept a close watch on sacred spaces. The various monasteries in the Troodos Mountains were of particular concern as colonial officials suspected these were used as important staging and recovery points. Consequently, several major operations targeted these religious structures, including Operation Pepperpot in 1956 and Operation Whisky Mac in 1957.<sup>63</sup> These activities, of course, played right into the insurgents’ hands. After Operation Pepperpot, for example, EOKA released a leaflet that claimed, “[c]hurches and monasteries were now turned upside down by the security forces looking for weapons and ammunition.” And, security forces were accused of letting “dogs into the churches and into the altars where they licked the holy sacraments.”<sup>64</sup> It was a public relations disaster for the British.

The religious zeal, or at least perceived enthusiasm, of EOKA foot soldiers also concerned British authorities. In May 1957 the interrogators of a group of seven captured mountain guerrillas remarked, “A notable feature of the mentality of these gangsters is the religious fervour with which they had sustained their morale. Even their capture on Good Friday lent itself to a suitable interpretation in their minds.”<sup>65</sup> Similar views can be found at a detention camp near Nicosia from that same year. Responding to an inquiry about the rehabilitation of

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<sup>58</sup> TNA FO 371/123876: Outward telegram from Commonwealth Relations Office, 9 March 1956; TNA FO 317/117677: Inward Telegram to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 2 December 1955; TNA FO 371/123918: Inward Telegram to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.,18 August 1956; TNA FCO 141/3155: Political Intelligence: Bishop of Kitium, 18 January 1958.

<sup>59</sup> TNA FO 953/1820: The Church and Terrorism in Cyprus, 33-34.

<sup>60</sup> TNA DEFE 13/7: Report by Chief of the Imperial General Staff on His Visit to Cyprus, 23-27 November 1958.

<sup>61</sup> TNA FO 371/123865: Draft Reference to the Law Officers, 30 December 1955.

<sup>62</sup> TNA WO 33/2736: A History of EOKA 1954-1959.

<sup>63</sup> Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London, Private Papers of I.W.G. Martin, Papers relating to his work as an interpreter in Cyprus, 1957-1958; Imperial War Museum. Private Papers of I.W.G. Martin. Letters from Cyprus, June – August 1958; TNA WO 305/15: Report on Operation Whiskey Mac, 15 March 1957.

<sup>64</sup> TNA CO 926/671: PEKA Leaflet 129/57.

<sup>65</sup> TNA CO 926/671/CIC(57)13 (Final): CIC, Intelligence Review for the second half of April 1957; TNA CO 926/678: Harding to Colonial Office, 20 Apr 1957.

captured rebels at Pyroi Camp, an official concludes that “... every detainee is still 100 per cent for Enosis and 100 percent for obeying the Archbishop.”<sup>66</sup>

Finally, as in Mandatory Palestine, the influence of religious holidays did not go unnoticed in Cyprus. For instance, a 1958 security report warned there might be an increase in attacks against security forces around Greek Easter.<sup>67</sup> Another report in 1957 warned that the commemoration of *Oxi* day, which celebrates Greek resistance to Fascist Italy during World War II, could put people in a frame of mind “most amenable for the propaganda in the Church services.”<sup>68</sup> Finally, the British were also aware of the possibility that sacred time could restrain violence. As but one example, a 1958 report from the Governor’s office projected a reduction of EOKA violence during the Christmas season.<sup>69</sup>

To summarize, the British faced an old and complicated issue on Cyprus. Calls for enosis were not new, but they took on a renewed fervor by the 1950s. This was not particularly a religious goal, but it is understandable that it appeared so in many respects to colonial officials. It was the Cypriot Orthodox Church that drove the Greek Cypriot community down the path of enosis. And, religious symbols, rituals, and identities framed and reinforced the movement. On top of this, religion took on a more salient role in the conflict following the discovery of the Grivas diaries. Those documents confirmed what many British officials long suspected. The following section details how these dynamics shaped British strategic preferences away from a bargained solution and towards military force.

#### 4.4 British Response

The strategic significance of Cyprus shifted over the decades. By the mid-twentieth century it was viewed as a central point of focus for British imperial forces in the Middle East. In 1946, the Chiefs of Staff concluded, “By retaining Cyprus we retain the only British possession in the Eastern Mediterranean, and we should be free to develop bases in the island as we require them without outside interference or the hampering effect of treaties.”<sup>70</sup> The position of Cyprus took on increased importance after the loss of Mandate Palestine and a declining hold on the Suez Canal Zone.<sup>71</sup> By 1953, the colonial administration established a new HQ for their Middle East forces on the island.<sup>72</sup> The rebellion led by EOKA, therefore, could not have come at a more precarious time as Egypt slipped from colonial control and the British consolidated their regional power on Cyprus. Yet, these security interests are not the only reason British officials clung so stubbornly to their hold of the island.

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<sup>66</sup> TNA FCO 141/3641/69: Pyroi Camp “X”, Release of Detainees Report No. 2, 29 June 1957. A report from a year prior optimistically noted the disorganization of EOKA following the deportation of the Archbishop. See TNA FCO 371/123887/856: “Cyprus and enosis”.

<sup>67</sup> TNA CO 926/680. Weekly Political Situation Reports, 16 April 1958.

<sup>68</sup> TNA FCO 141/4309: Precautions Against Disturbances at Political Anniversaries and Celebrations: OXI Day, 7 September 1957.

<sup>69</sup> TNA CO 926/1072: Governor’s Reports on the Situation in Cyprus, 24 December 1958.

<sup>70</sup> TNA CAB 80/50/COS(45)216: COS Committee. Reconsideration of the future of Cyprus, 15 Sept 1945. That remained the COS’s position throughout the conflict.

<sup>71</sup> Sir Hugh Foot. Mss Mediterranean s. 35.1/2: Brief for Sir Hugh Foot. No 13. The strategic importance of Cyprus, 18 Sept 1954.

<sup>72</sup> TNA CAB 129/56/C(52)382: Alexander, Move of the Middle East Headquarters, 4 Nov 1952. See also David Devereaux, *The Formulation of British Defense Policy Towards the Middle East, 1948–56* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), 106–8

This section considers how the correspondence bias embedded in British strategic culture also affected the way colonial officials interpreted and responded to the threat of EOKA. If my theory is correct, it should have been a persistent lens through which they understood the information they gathered about the insurgents and the efficacy of competing policy options. More specifically, British policymakers should have fixated on the short-term consequences of EOKA activities, rather than their stated policy objectives. And, government and military officials should have inferred that a political settlement was an unlikely solution because they deemed the insurgents to be intransigent.

In contrast to the previous chapter, this section compares British evaluations and policy debates between two distinct periods of the conflict, rather than across insurgent groups. I show that the inferences drawn about EOKA became particularly acute after the summer of 1956, when the Archbishop's involvement in the insurgency became undeniably clear.

#### **4.4.1 Information Gathering**

The views of British officials that came to dominate decision making during the Emergency Period were far from inevitable. Prior to the outbreak of violence in 1955, political elites and the general public in Britain alike expressed more sympathy with the Cypriot people than with other subjects in colonies on the periphery of the Empire. Greek Cypriots were seen as more modern and more Western. This view is well summarized by Conservative MP Richard Broom-White during a visit to the island in 1954: "It seems inconceivable that the Cypriots could become vicious like the Egyptians".<sup>73</sup> These perceptions quickly changed once violence broke out on the island.

When the first explosions erupted across Cyprus, the colonial government had no clear idea who lay behind the actions.<sup>74</sup> Officials on the island suspected that armed resistance was being planned from both the increased fervor of religious sermons and the capture of a ship, the *Ayios Georgios*, attempting to smuggle explosives and firearms onto the island in January 1955. However, they remained unaware of any formally organized resistance until EOKA announced itself by scattering leaflets after the bombings on April 1, 1955.

The British responded cautiously. They had no intelligence on EOKA; they didn't even know if "Dighenis" represented a person or a committee.<sup>75</sup> Their initial efforts were, therefore, intended to demonstrate that the budding insurgency had not "disrupted the normal life of the Government and people of Cyprus."<sup>76</sup>

To that end, the British spent considerable effort both augmenting the Cyprus Police Force and collecting intelligence on EOKA. The latter continued over the course of the conflict. And, the security forces would compile a voluminous compendium of EOKA pamphlets and materials by 1959. There is little doubt, therefore, that colonial officials were well familiar with the stated objectives and policies of the insurgents. This would matter little, however, as the conflict persisted. The British increasingly focused on the death and destruction caused by EOKA attacks, not what they were intended to achieve.

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<sup>73</sup> As cited by Holland, *Britain and the Revolt*, 53.

<sup>74</sup> Susan Lisa Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and Colonial Counter-Insurgency, 1944-1960* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1995), 197.

<sup>75</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Revolt*, 55.

<sup>76</sup> TNA FO 371/117629: Armitage to Lennox-Boyd, 5 April 1955.



EOKA violence initially targeted British military installations, and Greek Cypriots working with the colonial authorities, especially for the Cyprus Police Force. The latter included the assassination of a number of Special Branch members within the first few months of the conflict. These activities were met with mixed anxieties. Some officials, especially those back in Whitehall, did not seem to grasp the full extent of the problem on Cyprus. The British press, in contrast, promoted an image of “terror island” in light of the increasing number of assassinations.<sup>77</sup> And, colonial officials on Cyprus increasingly came to adopt this latter position. The Cyprus Police Commissioner, for instance, described EOKA’s goal as “a definite policy of murder” as early as June 1955.<sup>78</sup> This was before British officials had determined an objective for the group or collected much information about its membership.

Despite the limited information on EOKA, security forces increased their activities. Barbed wire encircled police stations and cordon-and-searches of villages occurred with more frequency. At the same time, Harding insisted that no “lowering in the standards of courtesy and consideration on the part of the administration or the Security Forces will be tolerated. It is perfectly possible to combine firmness with good manners and that will always be the guiding principle in all dealings with the general public.”<sup>79</sup> This policy became progressively more difficult to maintain as EOKA activities increased and the British focused more on the mounting destruction and lethality of the conflict.

Another interesting dynamic from early in the conflict is that the Church of Cyprus and Makarios III were initially seen as an ally. In the London press, the Archbishop was portrayed in a favorable light. For instance, a 1954 *Observer* article described his character as warm and striking, his eyes as “gentle, slightly hooded but good-humoured”, and his focus on “underlying spiritual matters”.<sup>80</sup>

Few British officials were as enamored, but they accepted, if reluctantly, that the Church had significant influence on the island. And, they expected Makarios, like their religious leaders back home, to at the very least denounce violence of any kind. The fact that he didn’t confounded colonial administrators. In addition, they expressed considerable frustration that they could not determine where Makarios’ religion ended and his politics began.<sup>81</sup>

By the summer of 1956, the situation changed dramatically with the capture of General Grivas’ diaries. The suspicions of Church involvement were confirmed. And, British views of EOKA reflected this new information. Most notably, they now attributed a more “provocative” function or “senseless quality” to many of EOKA’s attacks, especially those on British civilians unconnected with the administration and security forces.<sup>82</sup> This led them to infer that EOKA was not fighting to win over the sympathy of the local population, despite this being a stated objective of the group. Instead, they now unequivocally believed that EOKA was trying to convince the British they had no place on Cyprus and the cost of staying would be their lives.<sup>83</sup>

Colonial officials drew these conclusions despite the fact that there was no significant increase in EOKA activity. In fact, the first, and perhaps, largest EOKA offensive took place between October 1955 and March 1956. A second phase to those operations ignited after the

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<sup>77</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Revolt*, 81.

<sup>78</sup> Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, 197

<sup>79</sup> As cited in French, *Fighting EOKA*, 203.

<sup>80</sup> As cited in Stanley Mayes, *Cyprus and Makarios* (London: Putnam, 1960), 33.

<sup>81</sup> TNA CO 926/961: The Church and Terrorism in Cyprus, 15 December 1956.

<sup>82</sup> Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*.199.

<sup>83</sup> TNA CO 926/454: Appreciation of the Situation by Dighenis, 5 July 1954.

deportation of Makarios and lasted until November 1956. However, the intensity of fighting was not significantly, different between the two periods. If anything, the former was the more deadly.

Yet, EOKA was construed as more hostile and fanatical from the second stage of fighting on. The British concluded that the organization imposed its hegemony over the Greek Cypriot population by murder and intimidation.<sup>84</sup> It admitted that EOKA did mount some spectacular sabotage operations, “but, for the most part it was four years of stealthy murder of people usually momentarily defenceless, and nearly always carried out in circumstances where there was no risk to the attacker.”<sup>85</sup> Grivas was also increasingly accused of using “fascist strong-arm methods.”<sup>86</sup> Even the youngest members of EOKA were not above reproach. Arrested members of a Limassol sabotage group in November 1956, for instance, were described as “cold-blooded murderers capable of killing in broad daylight in urban areas after carefully selecting soft targets and opportune escape routes”.<sup>87</sup> Some of these members were only fifteen years old.

By late 1956, the British also identified a “hardcore, fanatical” core to the insurgent organization “surrounded by a much larger number of hangers-on”.<sup>88</sup> Harding defined this extreme element as “fanatical EOKA supporters, the members of the mountain gangs who were prepared to carry out any crime to further their own ends.”<sup>89</sup> This language is eerily reminiscent of assessments made about the Stern Gang in Mandatory Palestine. At the end of the conflict, the unofficial record by the War Office claimed that at any one moment EOKA never had more than 200 – 300 of these hard-core members.<sup>90</sup> Yet, two years earlier at the height of a renewed offensive by EOKA, a senior colonial official insisted that almost all of the nearly 800 persons in detention represent “a hard core of men who have shown themselves capable of murder, either by bombs or firearms.”<sup>91</sup> This discrepancy is line with my argument that officials fixate on the short-term consequences, rather than political objectives, of religious insurgents during a conflict. According to EOKA’s own accounts after the conflict, the first estimate is far more accurate.<sup>92</sup> Yet, the British saw more of a threat than may actually have been the case.

Finally, the British saw the Church increasingly in adversarial terms. Orthodox priests were described, for example, as “crusaders.”<sup>93</sup> It was partly for this reason that they assumed the arrest and deportation of the head of the church, Archbishop Makarios III, in 1956 might decapitate EOKA.<sup>94</sup> This tactic, however, failed and led to considerably more unrest on the island.<sup>95</sup>

In sum, British officials, especially those on the island, focused more on the consequences of EOKA’s violence than its stated goals. They were well aware of the latter. EOKA propaganda littered not only the streets, but also the file rooms of colonial offices. Yet, these were not to be believed. EOKA’s actions spoke louder than words.

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<sup>84</sup> TNA CO 926/1123: Papadopoulos to Smith, 8 Dec 1958.

<sup>85</sup> TNA FCO 141/4488: W.M.T. Magan, Grivas: A Personality Sketch, 11 Mar 1959.

<sup>86</sup> TNA WO 33/2736: History of EOKA, 1954–1959, 20 April 1960.

<sup>87</sup> TNA CO 926/670/CIC(56)36(Final): CIC, Intelligence Review for the first half of Dec 1956, 21 Dec 1956.

<sup>88</sup> TNA CO 926/521: Security Ops in Cyprus, 1954–56.

<sup>89</sup> TNA FCO 141/4313: Harding to Colonial Office, 27 July 1956.

<sup>90</sup> TNA WO 33/2736: History of EOKA, 1954–1959, 20 April 1960.

<sup>91</sup> TNA FCO 141/4342: US(IS) to Sinclair, 2 Dec 1957.

<sup>92</sup> Varnavas, *A History of the Liberation Struggle of EOKA 1955-1959*, 70; French, *Fighting EOKA*, 65.

<sup>93</sup> TNA WO 33/2736: A History of EOKA 1954-1959.

<sup>94</sup> An initial report noted the disorganization of EOKA following the deportation of the Archbishop. However, this soon proved to be overly optimistic. See TNA FCO 371/12388: Cyprus and enosis.

<sup>95</sup> For example, Greek-Cypriots called a three-day general strike. See Holland, *Britain and the Revolt*, 120.

#### 4.4.2 Strategic Preferences

The focus on EOKA's means rather than ends had two important repercussions on British strategic preferences during the Emergency Period. The first concerns the insurgent organization's motives. Despite the group not having maximalist aims, the British inferred, otherwise.

The goals of EOKA remained consistent throughout the conflict. They sought an end to British political and military influence on the island, the right of self-determination, and the eventual political union of Cyprus with Greece. These claims were, as with many insurgent groups, often couched in hyperbolic terms. A 1955 leaflet issued by Grivas, for example, states, "With the help of God, with faith in our honourable struggle, with the backing of all Hellenism, and the help of the Cypriots, WE HAVE TAKEN UP THE STRUGGLE TO THROW OFF THE ENGLISH YOKE, our banners high, bearing the slogan which our ancestors had handed down to us as a holy trust—DEATH OR VICTORY."<sup>96</sup> The final line is reminiscent of the Cretan rebel call in the 1860s.

While EOKA leaflets often presented their cause in colorful language to rouse support, Grivas provides a more straightforward outline of the objectives of EOKA in his memoirs. He writes:

By deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice to draw the attention of international public opinion, especially among the allies of Greece... By continually harassing the British in Cyprus, we must show that we are firmly determined not to yield, whatever the sacrifice, but that on the contrary we are prepared to continue until international diplomacy exercised through the UN, and the British in particular, are compelled to examine the Cyprus problem and reach a speedy settlement in accordance with the aspirations of the Cypriot people and the whole Greek nation. It should not be supposed that by these means we should expect to impose a total defeat on the British forces in Cyprus. Our purpose is to win a moral victory through a process of attrition, by harassing, confusing and finally exasperating the enemy forces, with the objective of achieving our main aim.<sup>97</sup>

Three points are worth noting about this lengthy statement. First, Grivas makes clear that EOKA did not seek a "total defeat" of British forces. The struggle was not to radically alter the status quo on the island. Rather, the movement, and especially Makarios, initially sought to work through democratic channels to advance the call for enosis through a public referendum. When that failed, they turned to violence. But, this was meant to be a means to a larger objective.

Second, Grivas states explicitly that the group desired a "speedy settlement". They were not, as the British often implied, unreasonable and uncompromising. Indeed, Grivas tried to overcome these labels by appealing directly to British residents on Cyprus. A 27 March 1956 leaflet, for instance, was distributed in English and made the following appeal to British residents of Cyprus: "This is a calling to all of you: as from to-day, by all means—letters or other pressure to those who can help, here or in England, you try to end this shameful situation in Cyprus. This

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<sup>96</sup> TNA FCO 141/4353: Extracts from the Grivas Diaries, 2 Apr 1955. Emphasis not added.

<sup>97</sup> Grivas, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 5.

will be done by giving the Cyprus people the Divine Rights of Self- Determination.”<sup>98</sup> Grivas also offered short-term truces to the British during at least one period of each fighting year from 1956 to 1958. And, there is good reason to suspect that the EOKA leader was not merely acting strategically at these times. Most notably, Grivas never called these truces at a point in time when EOKA was hard pressed by the security forces and needed a breathing space to regenerate.<sup>99</sup> Rather, he offered them when there was already a lull in the violence.

Third, and perhaps most importantly for my argument, British security forces were well aware of EOKA’s stated objectives from early in the conflict. A 1955 confidential intelligence appraisal, for instance, captures the core idea that EOKA’s “main object of attack is public opinion, *not* any particular physical target.”<sup>100</sup> This assessment was made after the melodramatic leaflet described above. However, over the course of the conflict, British officials came to see EOKA as fighting for more than what they said.

The clearest example of the British inferring maximalist aims for EOKA comes from the Harding-Makarinos talks that took place from October 1955 to February 1956. The prominent British historian Robert Holland characterizes these meetings as “one of the most protracted and complex exchanges in the history of British decolonization after the Second World War.”<sup>101</sup>

The attitude at the start of the talks was “frank and cordial”.<sup>102</sup> The Archbishop made explicit his desire for a political settlement. And, this was met with cautious optimism from Harding. The Governor wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in late November, “Conditions already warrant such a step [emergency regulations], but I have refrained from seeking your authority for it while there remains the slightest hope of gaining the Archbishop’s co-operation.”<sup>103</sup>

Over time, however, the relationship deteriorated. The Archbishop’s theological habit of chiseling away little gains by protracted argument created in Harding an impression of insatiability, which made him increasingly uneasy and impatient over the five-month exchange.<sup>104</sup> The fact that Makarios was a religious figure from an unfamiliar tradition accentuated these issues. Harding made no secret that he was intensely uncomfortable negotiating with the Primate of the Cypriot Orthodox Church.<sup>105</sup> In particular, he found the fact that a religious leader engaged in the same “subterfuges and tricks” as leaders of “underdog nationalities” extremely disconcerting.<sup>106</sup> And, before long, the Governor wrote to Lennox-Boyd, “[I] Am withholding recommendation of the declaration of state of emergency pending the results of the meeting with Makarios. If his attitude remains uncompromising I have little doubt that it will be necessary to declare a state of emergency and take consequential action.”<sup>107</sup> By February 1956, Harding’s patience would run out. Not even one year into the conflict, the most

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<sup>98</sup> TNA FCO 141/3709: Digenis, To all British Soldiers and Citizens and to their Families now in Cyprus, 27 Mar 1956.

<sup>99</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 6.

<sup>100</sup> TNA CO 926/454: CIC(55)27 (Final) The Nature of EOKA, Its Political Background and Sources of Direction, 18 October 1955.

<sup>101</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Revolt*, 85.

<sup>102</sup> TNA FCO 371/117664: Harding telegram to Lennox-Boyd, 5 October 1955.

<sup>103</sup> TNA CO 926/561: Harding to Colonial Secretary, 23 Nov 1955.

<sup>104</sup> Holland, *Britain and the Revolt*, 85.

<sup>105</sup> See Holland, *Britain and the Revolt*, 95.

<sup>106</sup> TNA WO 32/16260: Harding to Colonial Secretary, 5 Oct 1955.

<sup>107</sup> TNA CO 926/545: Harding to Colonial Secretary, 4 Oct 1955.

positive of British officials wrote that any agreement with Makarios would not end the conflict. Rather, it would merely initiate a new phase.<sup>108</sup>

This mounting doubt in the efficacy of a political settlement is the second consequence of the way British authorities interpreted EOKA's activities and goals. Once they inferred Makarios and his group sought a maximalist objective, they discounted the efficacy of a negotiated settlement. This resulted in a shift towards coercion for dealing with the local population, EOKA fighters, and the clergy. And, the religious nature of the conflict was often referenced to explain these policies.

Prior to the discovery of the Grivas diaries, the British focused on undermining the influence of the Church, but not employing force against Greek Cypriot communities. As Harding summarized in a December 1955 telegram to the Colonial Office, "We cannot expect in a short time to induce the Greek Cypriots to see their basic Hellenism in perspective but we can do something about the agencies who are at present inflaming and exploiting these emotions to the point of violence."<sup>109</sup> His plan focused heavily on improving the social and economic situation of the Greek Cypriot community so as to demonstrate the benefits of British rule.

By the summer of 1956, security forces shifted to more coercive tactics with the Greek Cypriot community. In July, for instance, the Nicosia District Security Committee set the following policy:

Collective punishments should be used to demonstrate to the individual that subservience to the Greek Orthodox Church does not pay. He must, if normal logic does not prompt him to aspire to freedom of political thought, be forced by unpleasant sanctions to think independently in the direction that the ruling Power has decided is in the best interests of the future of Cyprus as a healthy member of the British Commonwealth... He must be brought to realise that subservience to a religious organisation as the dictator of its political expression is contrary to the modern political development of any country<sup>110</sup>

This example illustrates how British officials believed that not only did the Church have a strong hold over the Greek Cypriot population, but also that it could only be broken (if at all) through force.

A similar view came to dominate attitudes' towards EOKA. By mid-1957, EOKA had been checked and contained for a period of time. Yet, still British officials doubted a bargained solution would bring the conflict to its final end. In May 1957, Harding wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies: "Terrorism is still latent in Cyprus. EOKA has a certain limited existing potential and also a definite recovery capability. Archbishop Makarios remains intransigent and would not hesitate to start terrorism again if he decided it would serve his purpose."<sup>111</sup>

Harding's replacement later that year, Sir Hugh Foot, would reach a similar conclusion. Although he had a reputation for liberalism and a preference for a peaceful settlement, coercive measures increased, rather than decreased during his tenure. This has much to do with the intercommunal violence that began to erupt between Greek Cypriot and Turkish communities in 1958. However, views of EOKA, which resurfaced with renewed vigor around that time, also played a part. A 1958 telegram from Foot succinctly summarizes his position: "the main enemy

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<sup>108</sup> TNA FCO 371/117678: Harding to Lennox-Boyd, 15 December 1955.

<sup>109</sup> TNA CO 926/474: Harding to Colonial Office, 23 Dec 1955.

<sup>110</sup> TNA FCO 141/4682: Beresford, to Administrative Secretary, 14 July 1956.

<sup>111</sup> TNA FCO 141/4412: Harding to Lennox-Boyd, 24 May 1957.

is EOKA and only continuous and relentless action will eliminate it.”<sup>112</sup> In the end, the new Governor ordered the detention without trial of more people in the space of a week than Harding had detained in the whole of his time on the island.<sup>113</sup>

Finally, religious clergy continued to stand out as the main stumbling block to a political settlement. The British thought they had scored a major victory when they deported Makarios in March 1956. They couldn't have been more wrong. The Archbishop's removal created a deep sense of resentment even amongst people who previously had been sympathetic to the British.<sup>114</sup> And, no alternative interlocutor emerged to represent the Greek Cypriot community. Remarks by the Deputy Governor, George Sinclair capture the situation the British made for themselves. In a 1957 telegram he insisted, “there is no one among the Greek Cypriots with whom you can have effective discussions except nominees of EOKA”<sup>115</sup>

Eventually international pressure advocated for Makarios' return as a way to push towards a political settlement. The British remained deeply cynical of this possibility. The Secretary of State for the Colonies Lennox-Boyd went so far as to tell the House of Commons that Makarios would not be allowed to return to Cyprus unless he condemned violence.<sup>116</sup> But, this proved to be an empty threat. Makarios did return; negotiations pushed forward; and a political settlement was reached in February 1959.

In the end, the British reluctantly accepted the London and Zurich Agreements. This was in large part due to domestic politics, as discussed previously. But, it was also influenced by the military assessment at the time. The British Defence Co-ordinating Committee (Middle East) and the Joint Planning Staff in London remained convinced that retaining the whole of the island was essential to British interests. The Minister of Defence, Duncan Sandys, argued otherwise. He squashed their recommendations, stating, “In its present state of unrest Cyprus is more of a military liability than a military asset.”<sup>117</sup> He added, “If the size of our garrison is to be reduced to tolerable limits, a political settlement is essential; and the proposals now being discussed between the Greek and Turkish Governments, offer for the first time the hope of such a settlement.”<sup>118</sup> Would Sandys have been so eager to accept this proposition if international actors were not involved in the negotiation process? It is beyond the scope of this study to answer this question. But, what the evidence does suggest is that such a compromise was reached much later than it otherwise might have been had the British not faced an insurgent movement so defined by its religious dimensions.

Although the British knew very little about EOKA at the start of the insurgency, they expressed little doubt about the insurgent organization's goal by the end of the conflict. EOKA had a maximalist objective to impose a total defeat on the British and radically change life on the island. Consequently, EOKA was not a group with which one could reason. These inferences were strongly shaped by the increased saliency of religion in the conflict. And, they meant British officials remained reluctant to reach a political settlement right up to the end of the conflict.

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<sup>112</sup> TNA DEFE 13/97: Cyprus Internal Security, Telegrams from Hugh Foot, Nov 1958.

<sup>113</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 269.

<sup>114</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 105.

<sup>115</sup> TNA CO 926/1071: Sinclair to Foot, 28 Nov 1957.

<sup>116</sup> Bodleian Libraries, Rhodes House Library: Sir Hugh Foot. Mss Mediterranean s. 35.1/3. Martin to Foot, 4 Dec 1957.

<sup>117</sup> TNA DEFE 11/340: Sandys to BDCC(Middle East), 6 Jan 1959.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

## 4.5. Alternative Explanations

The conventional wisdom for religious conflict intractability provides at least two alternative interpretations for the resolve and resiliency of EOKA. The means mechanism suggests that the religious dimensions of EOKA enabled them to fight longer and harder than if they had drawn on purely materialist incentives.

The British certainly believed this was the case. In line with the evidence presented above, an officer interviewing captured rebels in 1957 reported, “The marked religious fervor with which members of this gang have sustained their morale is noteworthy and some are quite convinced that ‘God and the Virgin’ have hitherto protected them from capture.”<sup>119</sup> The zeal of EOKA fighting was a major concern for the British; at least it was an anxiety they frequently voiced. And, it was certainly an idea EOKA veterans and Cypriot organizations have been quick to reinforce. A recurrent theme of their histories are heroic EOKA fighters, captured and tortured by the British, who never divulged any information, preferring instead to become martyrs for the righteous cause of enosis.<sup>120</sup>

Yet, despite British and Cypriot reports of a religious commitment to EOKA, coercive force best explains the cohesion of the insurgent organization.<sup>121</sup> Of the civilian deaths mentioned above, the majority was at the hands of EOKA for defecting from the organization or cooperating with the British authorities. The assassination of defectors was often conducted publicly to deter similar behavior in the future.<sup>122</sup>

The British were not unaware of these factors. Constant reports came in throughout the summer and early autumn of 1957 that “intimidation is still effective in preventing any open deviation from the Ethnarchy line.”<sup>123</sup> By the end of September the Commissioner at Lefka reported, “The pressure of fear is being successfully maintained by visits and attacks of masked men.”<sup>124</sup> Yet, despite the clear coercion employed by EOKA, the British saw the religious dynamics as equally, if not more, important to contributing to the group’s cohesion.

If religion was not particularly influential in holding EOKA together, perhaps it enabled them to fight longer and harder. The evidence here too points in the opposite direction. The insurgency in Cyprus was never particularly destructive. This can largely be chalked up to the inexperience and poor training of EOKA fighters. As but one example, consider that only one of five assassination attempts in the summer of 1955 was successful. Two failed entirely, and two others left the victims injured, but alive.<sup>125</sup> Religion may have enabled EOKA to lower the inhibitions of some of its members to kill, but it did not increase the lethality of the group.

British losses were, thus low, especially in comparison to other conflicts around the time in Malaya and Kenya. Moreover, EOKA tactics centered on small acts of sabotage aimed at wearing down the British. Direct attacks on security forces did occur, but these were rare or limited to individual assassination attempts.

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<sup>119</sup> TNA CO 926/678: Weekly Political Situation Reports from Cyprus, 1957-1959.

<sup>120</sup> See Varnavas, *A History of the Liberation Struggle of EOKA 1955-1959*.

<sup>121</sup> French, *Fighting EOKA*, 193

<sup>122</sup> TNA FCO 141/4751: Intimidation of Greek-Cypriots by EOKA, 1958-59; TNA WO 33/2736: History of EOKA, 1954-1959, 20 Apr 1960.

<sup>123</sup> TNA FCO 141/3720: Wynne, Public Opinion Survey, 27 July 1957.

<sup>124</sup> TNA FCO 141/3720: Assistant Commissioner Lefka to COSDO, 30 Sept 1957.

<sup>125</sup> TNA CO 926/414: Main HQ, MELF to War Office, 18 July 1955; TNA CO 926/414: Armitage to Colonial Secretary, 12 Aug 1955; TNA CO 926/455/CIC(55)27(Final): CIC, The nature of EOKA, its political background and sources of direction, 18 Oct 1955.

A March 1959 report from the Cyprus government captures the scale of violence. One hundred and four British officers were killed and another 601 suffered injuries over the course of four and a half years. The police experienced 51 dead and 187 wounded. EOKA, in turn, lost fewer than 100 members at the hands of the security force. The Greek Cypriot civilians, of whom 263 were killed and another 252 injured, experienced the heaviest casualties.<sup>126</sup>

If religion did not provide the means for EOKA to hold out for the best deal possible, perhaps it offered the motivation? A second strand of the conventional wisdom suggests that religious goals are more intractable than nonreligious ones. And, the call for enosis did involve religious elements, including the commitment to bring all Greek Orthodox people into one political territory. But, was this an indivisible goal?

As discussed above, the British at least inferred this was the case. They saw Makarios as uncompromising and willing to hold out until he got exactly what he wanted – the full union of Cyprus with Greece. Anything short of this would mean the Cypriot people had fallen short of their historical and religious obligations.

The calls for “Enosis and only Enosis” stuck too well with the British. Their view of an intransigent cleric and insurgent group were as misplaced as their perception that religion was the primary glue that held EOKA together. Religious goals did matter, but not more than materialist concerns. The Archbishop and EOKA were open to compromise, although like any side they wanted to achieve the most they could from a bargained solution. Moreover, as discussed previously, Grivas engaged in a number of truces from 1956 to 1958. And, these were not the desperate attempts of a group on the ropes and desperate for respite. Finally, the London and Zurich Agreements signed in 1959 did not include everything the Archbishop desired, but he did sign it.

To summarize, the British saw the Stern Gang as more religious than they really were in Mandatory Palestine. They focused their attention on religious goals, ultra-Orthodox membership, and rituals such as the blowing of the shofar near the Western Wall. These were rather isolated incidents. In Cyprus, religious dimensions were a defining feature of EOKA. But, here the British overestimated their effects. EOKA drew on religion because the community to which they belonged did so. It was a part of their identities. It shaped how they organized and fought, but only to a limited degree. The group had pragmatic political objectives, which the British failed to see because they interpreted the conflict through a strategic culture that mischaracterized the threat posed by religious opponents. EOKA was a formidable opponent, but not primarily because of its religious nature.

## 4.6 Conclusion

Unlike in Mandatory Palestine, the shift in British strategic preferences during the Cyprus Emergency was one of degree, not kind. In the former case, the British moved from policies of pacification implemented by the police force to offensive measures coordinated by the military. In Cyprus, the question was more about how much force to employ. Even as the Governor of the island engaged in talks with the Archbishop, other colonial officials were planning for what to do when, not if, those negotiations failed. This is firmly in line with the argument proposed in this study. Because British forces were generally unfamiliar with the Cypriot Orthodox Church, their correspondence bias framed the struggle from the start. As the complicity of the Church became

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<sup>126</sup> TNA FCO 141/3126: Information Research Unit, Casualty state from 1 Apr 1955 to midnight 31 Dec 1958.



clearer, that lens was sharpened and negotiation went from a slim possibility to something completely taken off the table. Only after international pressure, the outbreak of intense intercommunal violence, and domestic political demands did a peace settlement become a viable option again – one reluctantly accepted.

The case of Cyprus, thus, illustrates how the religious dimensions of a conflict can severely undermine negotiation efforts because of state, not insurgent, intransigence. Despite the relatively low lethality of the conflict, government and military officials fixated on the activities of EOKA, not its stated objectives. And, they inferred the group would stop at nothing to achieve enosis. Similar to the previous chapter, the specific pieces of evidence offered in support of these claims pass three of the four process tracing tests employed in this study. Table 4.1 below summarizes the CPOs that apply to each.

**Table 4.1: Causal Process Observations of the Cyprus Emergency**

<b>Observation</b>	<b>Straw-in-the Wind Test (Some Support)</b>	<b>Hoop Test (Strong support)</b>	<b>Smoking Gun Test (Strongest Support)</b>
Actual or suspected religious violence	Religious leadership, material resources, beliefs, symbols, and rituals.	-	-
Religious insurgents not motivated by maximalist objective	-	The goal of EOKA was enosis. They did not seek the total defeat of the British, rather a political settlement that allowed for self-determination.	-
Officials fixate on short-term consequences	British officials emphasized insurgent destruction, especially after mid-1956.	-	-
Officials infer maximalist objectives	-	British officials determined that EOKA and the Archbishop would continue fighting, even if a political settlement was reached.	-
Officials demonstrate reluctance to compromise	-	-	Stated British reluctance to negotiate with the Archbishop.

The conventional wisdom that insurgents drive the intractability of religious conflicts receives less support in this case. Religion did influence the organization and conduct of EOKA. But, it was not the primary glue that held the group together; that was coercion. Religious beliefs or leadership also did not enable the Cypriot insurgents to conduct particularly lethal attacks. In fact, Cyprus was one of the least destructive insurgency wars the British engaged in during the early postwar period. This makes it even more remarkable that the British paid so much attention to the conduct of EOKA, rather than its external motivations.

Finally, EOKA did fight to achieve a goal that was, at least in part, religious. But, they never saw this as an indivisible objective. The call for “enosis and only enosis” suggested such a possibility, but many insurgent groups adopt hyperbolic rhetoric. In fact, the Cretan rebellion in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century could have provided an instructive example of a group making ostensibly rigid demands and then compromising. Even if the British were not familiar with the case of Crete, they had reasonable evidence from their interaction with Makarios and Grivas’ behavior to infer EOKA was open to a settlement that did not reach its full objective. EOKA was not the first, nor the last, to overstate its policy objectives. The fact that the British misperceived this supports my argument that religious violence obscures the policy objectives of insurgent groups.

To conclude, the conflict on Cyprus provides additional evidence that the intractability of religious conflict can be driven by policymakers’ perceptions of religion and refusal to compromise with groups that mobilize along these lines. This was the most overt case of such a rebellion in the postwar period. So, it may not be surprising that it provides strong support for my argument. If it should apply anywhere, it is here.

In other locations, such as Kenya, the religious elements of the insurgency were not always as clear or wide-ranging. But, this does not mean that policymakers’ correspondence bias was not active and influential. As I detail in the following chapter, the British demonstrated a great concern for the religious elements of the Mau Mau movement, not least because they were rather unfamiliar with these tribal rituals. This led them to draw many of the same inferences as the two previously discussed conflicts in the Mediterranean. The uprising in Kenya, therefore, suggests that British biases towards religion were not restricted to one geographic region or merely Abrahamic faiths.

Correspondence bias was a persistent component of British strategic culture. It was shared by multiple political and military elites across diverse contexts. And, it shifted preferences in the same general direction – away from compromise and towards military force. This would, however, not be the same liability in Kenya as it was in Mandatory Palestine and Cyprus. In East Africa, the British would achieve a military, although not long-term political, victory.

## Chapter 5

### The Mau Mau Uprising (1952 – 56): Struggling to Find Common Ground at God’s Resting Place

#### **5.1 Introduction**

“Their physical appearance and health improves, their eyes become clear, their address direct and confident, their skin begins to shine and their hair blackens.”<sup>1</sup> This is how one British officer in Kenya described the transformation of captive insurgents following their admission of complicity in the Mau Mau movement. Rehabilitation, re-education, and confession were common practices in the Pipeline, or the hundred or so detention centers that littered Kenya during the Mau Mau Uprising from 1952 to 1956.<sup>2</sup> These sites were used to sort, confine, interrogate, and extract labor from suspected and captured insurgents.<sup>3</sup>

Confessions were, understandably, an important component to this process. At the start of the insurgency, Mau Mau members were well integrated into urban centers. The British had a difficult time tracking their movements and discerning whom in the local population was for or against them. Information from captured insurgents, consequently, provided critical intelligence to sort combatants from passive locals. Names and locations were passed up to the Special Branch of the Kenya Police Service. Those police officers compiled and followed up on the most promising leads. The process of extracting information from prisoners, however, was more than merely a matter of standard police procedure.

Confessions in Kenya took on the form of religious conversion. The British expressed great concern over the initiation oaths and rites of Kenyan insurgents. And, they attempted to combat religion with religion. According to a 1954 Council of Ministers Memorandum, admissions of guilt were encouraged “with the object of removing from the individual’s mind and soul the poison of the more advanced Mau Mau oaths.”<sup>4</sup> It is little wonder, then, that Tom Askwith, the man tasked with designing the system of detention centers in Kenya, compared his work to an “exorcism”.<sup>5</sup>

Members of Kenya’s Protestant Churches played a particularly prominent role in the spiritual rehabilitation of insurgents. Revival evangelists of the East African churches operated freely in a number of detention camps between 1953 and 1956.<sup>6</sup> They preached, organized Bible study groups, and led Christian cleansing services. The latter required individuals to publicly confess a detailed list of their involvement with the Mau Mau and appeal for forgiveness. These

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<sup>1</sup> As cited in Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, C.1935-1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 236. See also Kenya National Archive JZ 8/1: Tom Askwith, “Medicine for the Mau Mau,” 1956.

<sup>2</sup> The Emergency Period, as well as the use of these detention camps, persisted until 1960. However, the primary fighting period was from 1952 to 1956. I focus on the first phase of the conflict in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> On these activities, and the abuses that took place in these camps, see Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005); David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> TNA FCO 141/5595: Council of Ministers Memoranda, December 1954 – February 1955.

<sup>5</sup> Askwith generally resisted the view of the Mau Mau as crazy, but the oaths instilled him a deep sense of anxiety. Accordingly, he approved of the rehabilitation activities. See Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism*, 237.

<sup>6</sup> After that time the Christian Revivalists were removed because British officials worried they were too easily accepting the confessions of detainees.

overt religious activities were most intense at Athi River camp. Teams of a dozen “Christian commandos” sermonized at this site in the Southern region of Kenya for several hours a day on loudspeakers in the hope of convincing prisoners to confess their connection to the Mau Mau.<sup>7</sup> Howard Church, one of the main Revivalist organizers, described the importance of this work as follows: “an evil ideology has gripped these people. If they are again to be useful citizens this ideology must be supplanted by a better and more powerful ideology.”<sup>8</sup>

The prevalence and intensity of Christian confessional rites points to a side of the Mau Mau Uprising not often plumbed. Most studies of the Emergency Period in Kenya acknowledge the role of tribal oaths and rituals, but place their analytic focus on ethno-nationalist aspirations or structural inequalities.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the conflict with the Mau Mau was more than a struggle for social, economic, and political reforms. It was also a spiritual war, at least in the eyes of colonial administrators and white settler communities.

This chapter investigates the religious dimensions of the Mau Mau Uprising and British response to these dynamics.<sup>10</sup> As with the previous chapters, my aim is not to capture what the Mau Mau “truly” believed or hoped to accomplish by requiring new members to participate in ritualistic blood sacrifices and other oath-taking activities. I also do not claim that the Mau Mau fought for religious goals. Rather, my focus is on how the British understood and reacted to the spiritual elements that confronted them.

As in the previous two chapters, I employ process tracing to show as explicitly as possible the link between British decision makers general beliefs about religion and their strategic preferences towards conflict settlement. The majority of the evidence I present comes from colonial records housed at either The National Archives in London or Rhodes House at the Bodleian Libraries at Oxford University. Documents from the Imperial War Museum and the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives at King’s College London also provide important background context for my analysis.

Unlike the case studies of Mandatory Palestine and Cyprus, I focus exclusively on descriptive inferences in this chapter. These demonstrate key pieces of evidence in support of each intervening step in a causal process. They concentrate on discrete moments in time, rather than compare across groups or time periods.<sup>11</sup> I, thus, draw on the case of the Kenya Emergency to provide additional detail about the two components of the intervening variable of strategic culture that I highlight in this study - information gathering and strategic preference. Many factors, of course, influenced British attitudes and policy choices in Kenya. This chapter demonstrates how religion was one important, and often overlooked, consideration.

The Mau Mau Uprising is particularly well suited to this task for at least three reasons. First, there was substantially more policy debate at the start of this conflict than the previous two

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<sup>7</sup> Bodleian Libraries, Rhodes House. Mss. Afr. s. 2257: Athi River Detention and Rehabilitation Camp, 4 April 1955.

<sup>8</sup> Bodleian Libraries, Rhodes House. Mss. Afr. s. 2257: Howard Church, The Athi Experiment.

<sup>9</sup> For examples, see E. S. Atieno Odhiambo and John Lonsdale, *Mau Mau & Nationhood: Arms, Authority & Narration* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2003); Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905-63* (East African Publishers, 1987); Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> There is no official name for this insurgency war. In the remainder of this chapter, I refer to the conflict as the Mau Mau Uprising and Kenya Emergency, interchangeably. Other analyses also refer to the conflict as the Mau Mau Rebellion or Mau Mau Revolt.

<sup>11</sup> David Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 4 (October 2011): 823–30; James Mahoney, “The Logic of Process Tracing Tests in the Social Sciences,” *Sociological Methods & Research* 41, no. 4 (November 1, 2012): 570–97.

insurgencies. Several prominent figures, including Prime Minister Winston Churchill and General George Erskine, saw the Mau Mau as a rational movement with political aims and a military strategy. Other key decision makers argued the rebels were driven by irrational, pseudo-religious beliefs. Most importantly, the white settler community firmly believed the Mau Mau insurgents were savages intent on destroying their way of life. In a relatively short time span, the view of these latter two groups gained traction and came to dominate policy discussions. These debates and swift convergence illustrate how correspondence bias may not be held by every official, but can still be an influential force that militates against compromise. In addition, it demonstrates how strategic culture mirrors societal biases.

Second, the conventional wisdom for religious conflict intractability, as in previous chapters, fails to adequately explain this case. The Mau Mau mobilized along religious and ethnic lines, and both factors influenced the structure and conduct of the group. However, as in Cyprus, religious rituals were only one of several influences on recruitment and retention. Furthermore, despite the rather intense initiation process required for entry into the Mau Mau movement, many members either did defect or cited some other reason (i.e., material incentives) for not doing so.

In addition, there is little evidence to support the notion that the Mau Mau movement was trying to drive out Christianity from Kenya and replace it with a new religion as so many British officials and settlers believed to be the case. Rather, like their counterparts on Cyprus, the Mau Mau had tangible political objectives over which they were open to bargaining.

Third, this case provides external validity for my study. While the focus remains on British security forces, events in Kenya illustrate that the religious biases I identify are not limited to one geographic region or a single type of religion, namely the Abrahamic faith traditions. If anything, they were more intense in this case because the British faced unfamiliar traditional practices.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds in five parts. In the first, I provide a brief background of the conflict. Given the scale of violence and military success of the British, the Kenya Emergency is cited by civil war scholars and counterinsurgency analysts more often than the previous two cases in this study. Still, I set the stage in the following section to emphasize two primary points. First, while the Emergency Period in Kenya lasted nearly a decade, the counterinsurgency phase was primarily from 1952 – 1956. After that time, only a few scattered remnants of the Mau Mau persisted in remote areas. The latter part of the Emergency Period focused, consequently, more on counterterrorism and constitutional reforms. My analysis is of the first phase of the conflict. Second, I highlight the decentralized, but not necessarily disorganized, nature of the Mau Mau movement. This is important context for comparing British perceptions of the group to the empirical record later in the chapter.

In the second section, I turn to the religious dynamics of the conflict. As in previous chapters, I point out those spiritual elements that were most easily observable to British forces. And, I provide evidence that colonial officials were, in fact, aware of these factors. Most notably, the British spent a great deal of time collecting, analyzing, and fretting over information about the oath-taking rituals Mau Mau recruits completed as part of their initiation into the movement.

In the third section, I consider how British perceptions of religious violence shaped their strategic preferences. According to my theory, correspondence bias should play a major role, similar to the latter period of fighting in Cyprus, in shaping how colonial officials evaluated and reacted to the Mau Mau insurgents. This is because the religious elements of the movement were construed as playing a central role in the conflict and the tribal rituals were unfamiliar to officials

both in London and the colony. The British construed the Mau Mau as anti-Christian and anti-European, not merely a group using religion and ethnicity as a convenient identity marker along which to mobilize. Moreover, these spiritual elements appeared foreign to the British, evidenced by government reliance on social science advisors to help them make sense of the oath-taking rituals. Ultimately, these religious factors produced a strong doubt in the minds of British officials that any common ground could be found with the Mau Mau insurgents.

In the fourth section, I consider alternative explanations for British intransigence. As with the other cases, there are strong reasons to doubt security forces were merely responding rationally to a particularly resilient or obstinate opponent. Religion served as an important background condition that shaped the organization and conduct of the Mau Mau. But, it did not create the superstitious fanatics the British imagined they were fighting.

The fifth, and final, section summarizes the key pieces of evidence from this case that support my theoretical framework. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that correspondence bias was an influential lens through which British government and military officials interpreted conflicts in East Africa, as well as the Mediterranean. It is not the only reason the British resisted a negotiated settlement with the Mau Mau. But, perceptions of religion played an important role in shaping threat perceptions and strategic preferences towards a military, rather than political, solution.

## 5.2 Conflict Background

In 1920, the territory formerly known as the East African Protectorate became the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya. As a crown colony, rule was transferred from the local administration to His Majesty George V's Government. The residents of Kenya now enjoyed the status of being formally incorporated into the Empire with none of the rights to elect the officials that governed them. Instead, a governor was appointed directly by officials in London and sent to act on the Crown's behalf.

Of less significance, but interesting nonetheless, was the addition of the term "Kenya" to the new crown colonies nomenclature. This was done in recognition of Mount Kenya, the second tallest mountain in Africa and a sacred site for many tribes in the region.<sup>12</sup> There are a number of conflicting accounts for how this prominent landmark got its name in English. But, many center on the idea that it is a mispronunciation of the Kikuyu title for the mountain – Kirinyaga.<sup>13</sup> That term roughly translates as "God's resting place", although the British were blissfully unaware of this fact. The misrepresentation, whether intentional or not, is hardly the last time the British misinterpreted the spiritual dynamics of life in Kenya.

Great Britain gained undisputed control of their territory in Kenya through a strange twist of fate. European missionaries made the first inroads in East Africa during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. As early as 1840, Johann Ludwig Krapf, a German Lutheran, set up a missionary station in Mombasa. This subsequently led to the establishment of a German protectorate over the coastal territories of what was then the Sultan of Zanzibar. By 1888, the British demonstrated their interest in the region through the founding of the Imperial British East Africa Company. It was tasked with advancing Great Britain's commercial interests by expanding trade relations from the

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<sup>12</sup> Most notably the Kikuyu and Embu tribes held this view. However, other ethnic groups, such as the Maasai, also made reference to Mount Kenya in prayers and rituals.

<sup>13</sup> More precisely, the Kikuyu name for Mount Kenya is Kĩrĩ Nyaga.

African Great Lakes region. However, when Germany surprisingly handed over its coastal holdings to Britain in 1890, the Company was also tasked with governing the protectorate. They did so for about half a decade. In 1895, the business was floundering and administrative control was transferred, first, to the Foreign Office and, then, to the Colonial Office.

By 1920, the East African Protectorate was formally incorporated into the Empire. White settlements rapidly expanded. One reason for this was that British officers who served in World War I were resettled in Kenya. By the early 1920s, for instance, over five hundred veterans and their families were living in the colony, many on expropriated land.<sup>14</sup>

Relations between these settlers and the local African population grew increasingly tense over the next few decades due to at least four primary reasons.<sup>15</sup> First, the colonial government established African reserves, which were defined rural areas where the local population was expected to live separate from the white settlers. Second, it established a new hut and poll tax, which placed considerable financial strain on many Kikuyu and other tribal members. Third, colonial authorities began to heavily regulate the movement of the local African population. For example, all African men leaving the reserves were required to carry a pass, or *kipande*, that recorded their name, fingerprints, ethnic group, past employment history, and current employer's signature.<sup>16</sup> The *kipande* became one of the most detested symbols of colonial rule, often placed in a small cigarette box, worn around the neck, and referred to as a goat's bell.<sup>17</sup> Fourth, because of insufficient government staff, the colonial authorities had to delegate power to tribal leaders. However, none existed in quite the form they desired. So, they created an artificial hierarchy in Kikuyu and other tribes by introducing a system of chiefs that would report directly to British officials. This intensified internal divisions already fomenting.

In response to these and other measures, a small group of educated young men in the colony formed a political organization called the Kikuyu Central Association, or KCA. It challenged the colonial establishment and advocated for the rights of the local African population, especially the Kikuyu ethnic group. They primarily voiced their concerns through the formal, and limited, channels of the colonial administration. At first, the British authorities let the KCA do so freely. But, when the KCA entered what came to be a heated cultural debate over female circumcision, they came to be seen as more than activists. The KCA was construed as anti-Western, anti-Christian agitators.<sup>18</sup> The British, consequently, outlawed the group. The KCA leaders would go underground, but not entirely disappear.

The Second World War brought new and more rapid change to the Kenya colony. Most important, rationing in Great Britain and the wartime demand for food transformed the agriculture sector into a substantially more profitable business. Local residents on African reserves were forced to abandon traditional farming practices to increase their yield. And, while this benefited a handful of local chiefs and elites, most Kikuyu and other tribe members did not see any profit. Rather, they were left with over-farmed lands after 1945.

At the same time, white settlers also made demands for more land to increase their profits. And, the colonial government was quick to respond to these calls. This was spurred on

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<sup>14</sup> As cited in Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> For more on each method, see Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 15 - 18.

<sup>16</sup> David M. Anderson, "Master and Servant in Colonial Kenya, 1895-1939," *The Journal of African History* 41, no. 3 (September 2000): 459-85.

<sup>17</sup> TNA CO 822/1896: Inquiry into the Origin and Growth of the Mau Mau in Kenya, 1960. See also Maia Green, "Mau Mau Oathing Rituals and Political Ideology in Kenya: A Re-Analysis," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 60, no. 1 (1990): 69-87.

<sup>18</sup> Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 21.

not least of which by a growing skepticism of the traditional agricultural practices employed by the local African population. All of this exacerbated the already all-to-obvious inequalities of colonial rule.

By the late 1940s, Kenya was ripe for rebellion. However, the disgruntled masses still lacked a mobilizing force. Kikuyu politicians from the KCA spent most of World War II in hiding. Afterwards, they reemerged and formed the Kenya African Union (KAU). Jomo Kenyatta took charge of this organization when he returned from a sixteen-year stint in Britain. And, while he did inject an enthusiasm and provide a central point of focus, he was not the primary factor that mobilized the masses. Rather, it was a group of several thousand Kikuyu squatters who faced repeated evictions by the colonial government.<sup>19</sup> Drawing on a traditional oath-taking practices aimed at forging bonds of solidarity during times of crisis, these squatters radicalized the practice and directed it in opposition to colonial authorities.

The oath-taking practices spread quickly, although covertly, as various African leaders recognized their potential for organizing resistance.<sup>20</sup> Members of the Kikuyu independent schools and churches played a particularly influential role. These organizations had been formed in the wake of the female-circumcision debate and were run by local Africans, not European missionaries or colonial officials. By 1950, oath-taking ceremonies were conducted so widely across the colony that they could no longer avoid detection. In addition, calls for reform were now slowly starting to be backed up by violence. The colonial authorities would brand the organization responsible for these activities the Mau Mau.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike in Cyprus, the Mau Mau movement did not announce the start of their rebellion with an official series of attacks or the distribution of leaflets to rally the local communities. Rather, a steady wave of violence built up in the early 1950s. By the summer of 1952, Secretary of State for the Colonies Oliver Lyttelton was receiving regular reports from the acting governor in Kenya of attacks on settler communities. Initially dismissed as alarmist, the murder of the first white victim on 3 October 1952 started to shift British perceptions. The assassination in broad daylight of a senior chief who supported the colonial administration – Waruhiu – just six days later radically altered them. Both attacks occurred within the first fortnight of the newly appointed governor, Evelyn Baring.<sup>22</sup> And, Baring wasted no time responding. On 20 October 1952, he signed an order declaring a State of Emergency. Early the next morning, Operation Jock Scott was launched. Jomo Kenyatta and 180 other alleged Mau Mau leaders in Nairobi were arrested.<sup>23</sup>

Coercion and brute force would define the British response to the Mau Mau over the next four years. Security forces took advantage of a wide range of emergency regulations, including communal punishments, curfews, confiscation of property, restrictions on movement, censorship of the media, and detention without trial.

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<sup>19</sup> Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905-63*.

<sup>20</sup> Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Much controversy persists over the etymology of this term. Some argue that like the word Kenya, it was a misinterpretation of the Kikuyu word for oath, muma. Others suggest it was the sound that security forces believed the insurgents made before their attacks. Still others hold that it is a type of Kiswahili play on words. What is certain is that the Kikuyu did not refer to their movement in this way, and the British did. I adopt the term in this study, much like the use of the Stern Gang rather than Lehi in Chapter 3, as I am interested in British perspectives of the movement. Mau Mau is the term they used to refer to the insurgents in almost all security reports.

<sup>22</sup> Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 32.

<sup>23</sup> Huw Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau: The British Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Kenya Emergency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 13.



A steep learning curve would also characterize the efficacy (or lack of efficacy) of these measures, as colonial officials carried many incorrect assumptions about the insurgents. Not least was the idea that arresting Jomo Kenyatta would decapitate the Mau Mau movement. This is partly understandable. Kenyatta was a well-known African intellectual and considered to be “one of the hierarchy of the Kenya African Union.”<sup>24</sup> But, it was not the KAU leading the Mau Mau, nor any organized political group.

Contrary to what the British believed, the Mau Mau was not a unified force. Rather, the movement was decentralized, comprised of various communities of supporters and fighting cells. The latter became known as forest gangs as they operated primarily in the Aberdare and Mount Kenya regions. In terms of its leadership, the Mau Mau pulled from a number of political and community organizations, the KAU being just one. And, many of the forest gangs had their own officers, to which they alone were accountable.

The fight against the Mau Mau would consist of two primary stages: 1952 – 1956 and 1956 – 1960. In the initial phase, security forces conducted standard counterinsurgency operations. After 1956 and the military defeat of the Mau Mau, the British focused more on counterterrorism efforts and constitutional reform.

One point of heavy emphasis, especially during the first year of fighting, was separating Mau Mau members from locals either loyal to the Crown or indifferent in combat zones.<sup>25</sup> This was primarily accomplished through expulsion and screening. The former became official policy in December of 1952, but even before then, large numbers were evicted from any area in which Mau Mau attacks took place.<sup>26</sup> Security forces, subsequently, engaged in extensive and continuous sweeps of the Reserves to which these expelled were sent. Those not removed from their homes were also vulnerable to the random screening of entire villages or neighborhoods. And, due to poor intelligence from the police services, the innocent were sent to the Pipeline at least as often as the complicit.

By 1953, sweep operations pushed into the forested areas of the Aberdare and Mount Kenya ranges. The majority of the armed Mau Mau based their operations out of these areas, which they knew far better than the security forces. The British tried to compensate for this limitation by declaring the forested regions as prohibited zones in January 1953. This meant that security forces could open fire without warning at any suspected persons found in either area.<sup>27</sup>

Whether in response to these British incursions or motivated by some other reason, Mau Mau attacks on settlers increased in 1953, including the slaughter of several families. In total 32 white settlers would die at the hands of Mau Mau insurgents over the 5 years of combat.<sup>28</sup> The British responded with the establishment of Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru Home Guard units. The hope was this would expand the security forces’ coverage. It was not enough.

Eventually, Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent General George Erskine to clean things up. Erskine was a senior British Army officer who gained notoriety for his command of the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division, or the Desert Rats, during World War II. And, his arrival on 7 June 1953 marked a decided shift in British operations.

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<sup>24</sup> TNA CO 822/485/2: Telegram no. 515. Governor Baring to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 29 April 1953.

<sup>25</sup> Since most of the violence was restricted to the Central and Rift Valley Provinces and Nairobi, many in the colony carried on as normal during the Emergency Period.

<sup>26</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, 14.

<sup>27</sup> TNA FCO 141/6130. Kenya: Mau Mau unrest; restriction of movement of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru (KEM), January 1953 – December 1954.

<sup>28</sup> TNA CO822/1220: The History of the Emergency in Kenya, 1960.

Rather than merely sweeping the periphery of the forested regions where the Mau Mau fighters hid, Erskine instituted a policy that was “as aggressive and offensive as possible against the MAU MAU.”<sup>29</sup> This included deeper penetration into the Aberdares and Mount Kenya regions through combined operations of armored and air force units, an increase in troop numbers, and the most extensive clear and hold operation of the entire conflict. Named Operation Anvil, it was aimed at completely rooting out all Mau Mau supporters from Nairobi. Over a two-week period, security forces detained, screened, and deported thousands of suspected Mau Mau. By the end of the operation, the British had sent some 20,000 suspects for further screening and another 30,000 to Kikuyu reserves.<sup>30</sup>

Operation Anvil spelled the beginning of the end for the Mau Mau. It severely disrupted their supplies, command and control structure, and recruitment efforts. And, the movement never quite recovered. By November 1956, British security forces had successfully routed most of the forest gangs through a series of operations that penetrated increasingly deep into their safe havens. The groups began to fractionalize, defectors surrendered in growing numbers, and eventually the British claimed a military victory. A few remnants of the Mau Mau did scatter into even more remote areas and continued to cause trouble for the colonial government over the next few years. But, as a movement, the Mau Mau had been crushed.

The military victory came as a great relief to British officials and settlers alike. In the halls of Government House, military circles, and the popular media, the Mau Mau had come to be portrayed as primitive savages engaged in senseless violence. The conflict was seen in civilizational terms. Even in the latter years of the Emergency Period when the focus turned to counterterrorism measures and constitutional reforms, the specter of the rebellion persisted.<sup>31</sup> As one prominent British historian puts it, “Mau Mau. The very words conjure up memories of something evil lurking in history’s dark shadow.”<sup>32</sup>

Why were the Mau Mau believed to be so evil? And, what consequence did this have on how the British countered the movement? In the remainder of this section, I detail how religion contributed to the view of the Mau Mau as primitives seeking to radically alter life in the Kenya. And, I show how this contributed to a strategic preference for military force, rather than negotiated settlement.

### 5. 3. Religious Dynamics

The Mau Mau movement is typically presented as an ethno-nationalist struggle against British colonialism. And, while much has also been written on the oath-taking rituals performed by initiates, this activity is, at the most, hesitantly framed as religious.<sup>33</sup> This is puzzling for two reasons. First, the oathing ceremonies resemble the rites and practices of other faith traditions,

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<sup>29</sup> TNA WO 276/526: GHQ East Africa Operational Directive no. 1, 16 June 1953.

<sup>30</sup> As cited in Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 124. See also TNA CO 822/796/2: Telegram from Acting Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 May 1954.

<sup>31</sup> Constitutional reforms would be a dead end. The inequalities of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, coupled with the exemplary force used during the Mau Mau Uprising, left wounds too deep to heal. Kenya was eventually granted independence in 1962.

<sup>32</sup> Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Indeed, three of the most oft-cited volumes on the Mau Mau Uprising and published in the last decade do not even include references to religion in their indexes. See Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*; Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*; Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*.

especially the commonly identified world religions, in many important respects. Second, the British clearly imputed a religious function and motivation to these ceremonies. From these observations they drew inferences that the group was irrational, savage, and would stop at nothing to completely change life in Kenya.

Past scholarship may have been reluctant to frame the Mau Mau in religious terms because it feared lending credence to these British labels and biases.<sup>34</sup> But, arguing that there was a strong religious dimension to the Mau Mau movement is not the same as arguing they fought for a religious cause, nor that they were irrational. Rather, much like in Cyprus, Mau Mau insurgents drew on traditional practices that were part of their identity and communities. It would be more surprising to find they shied away from, rather than, embraced these factors.

This section explores these religious dynamics and British reaction to them. It takes as its starting point the challenge issued by John Lonsdale several decades ago to consider “how Mau Mau was intellectually constructed before we can decide what it was and how it may have changed history”.<sup>35</sup> I begin by briefly outlining three primary religious dimensions that characterized the Mau Mau movement: oath-taking ceremonies, religious networks, and forms of prayer. I then demonstrate that the British collected and analyzed information about each, although it was the first dynamic that most captured their attention.

As previously discussed, the Mau Mau movement began through a wave of ritualistic oath-taking. This was a traditional custom among the local African population during times of crises. These practices reaffirmed a commitment to the community by reminding members of their moral duty towards one another.<sup>36</sup>

The Mau Mau transformed this established practice in several ways. First, they administered the oaths to anyone willing to take them. Traditionally, men only made these vows. For the Mau Mau, women and children were also welcome to do so since the movement was construed as a collective effort against the injustices of British rule.<sup>37</sup>

Second, the Mau Mau oaths sought to create an exaggerated detachment from European influences. Initiates would often be led into the forest and were required to strip down so as to remove any European clothing or objects, such as watches. They then participated in a ritualistic blood sacrifice. This typically involved both the ingestion of some of the slaughtered animal and the blessing of weapons with its blood. It was also often a collective rite in which a group of several candidates would be bound together by a strip of skin from a ceremonial goat.<sup>38</sup>

In terms of their content, there were two primary types of oaths one could take. The first focused on unity and was administered to most Mau Mau supporters. Similar to that taken by EOKA fighters in Cyprus, members affirmed a commitment to the movement and its leaders. And, they promised to never reveal any information about the Mau Mau.<sup>39</sup> The British colonial government estimated that roughly 90 percent of the entire Kikuyu community took this oath.<sup>40</sup>

Those willing to fight in the forest gangs also took a second set of vows – known as the *butani* or warrior’s oath. This supplemental ceremony was more private. It was never done in

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<sup>34</sup> Green, “Mau Mau Oathing Rituals and Political Ideology in Kenya,” 73.

<sup>35</sup> John Lonsdale, “Mau Mau of the Mind: Making Mau Mau and Remaking Kenya,” *The Journal of African History* 31, no. 03 (1990): 395.

<sup>36</sup> Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 25.

<sup>37</sup> Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905-63*.

<sup>38</sup> Green, “Mau Mau Oathing Rituals and Political Ideology in Kenya,” 76.

<sup>39</sup> Marshall S. Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs: History, Memory, and Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 99. See also Green, “Mau Mau Oathing Rituals and Political Ideology in Kenya.”

<sup>40</sup> Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 27.

large groups, for example. But, similar to the oath of unity, European objects and clothing were removed beforehand. The initiate then stood naked facing Mount Kenya and made his or her vows, which included a commitment to attack and kill settlers.<sup>41</sup>

All in all, oath-taking was a powerful ritual that had the potential to bind recruits more tightly together and increase commitment to the Mau Mau struggle. Moreover, as in Cyprus, the psychological effects of the oath-taking ceremonies may have helped to reduce the inhibitions of some members to commit violence.

While oath-taking ceremonies were the primary focus for the British, at least two other religious dynamics of the Mau Mau movement are also worth noting. The first pertains to religious networks. Despite the claim of British officials that the Mau Mau movement was anti-Christian, it had strong connections to the Kikuyu independent churches. These developed during the interwar period as organizations that acted autonomously from the many Christian missionary-based religious institutions in Kenya. The controversy over female circumcision was the proximate cause for these churches, but they represented a more general desire to maintain traditional practices free of the influence of Western missionaries while still worshipping in a Christian community.<sup>42</sup>

During the Mau Mau Uprising, the Kikuyu independent churches became a focal point of oath-taking activities. There is evidence, for instance, that many members of these communities took the oaths. Moreover, a number of the leaders of these institutions allowed their churches and schools to be used as centers for oath-taking ceremonies.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, most oath-takers saw no incompatibility between Mau Mau and Christian beliefs, often citing Biblical injunctions to fight against oppression.<sup>44</sup> For these members of the Mau Mau, the movement was an extension of their Christian faith. Thus, while the Mau Mau movement was primarily composed of one ethnic group (the Kikuyu), it contained some members who identified as Christian and others that did not.

The second additional religious dynamic to the Mau Mau movement concerns its forms of prayer. These centered mostly on a particular type of hymn, known as *nyimbo*. But, more general forms of invocations also played a prominent role in the movement. Elsie Mukami, the wife of the prominent forest gang leader Dodan Kimathi, described the Mau Mau as follows: “The freedom fighters were highly religious people. They knew and prayed to the God of Gikuyu and Mumbi.”<sup>45</sup> An oath administrator shared a similar sentiment after the conflict. In an interview, he stated, “We also had prayers in which we continuously emphasized the unforgettable and bitter fact that ‘We are praying to the God of Gikuyu and Mumbij who gave to us this country, a country that was alienated by white foreigners.’”<sup>46</sup> Finally, a former Mau Mau member, Joram Wamweya, recalls that daily prayers were a common group activity in the Rift Valley region.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Green, “Mau Mau Oathing Rituals and Political Ideology in Kenya.”

<sup>42</sup> Jocelyn Murray, “The Kikuyu Spirit Churches,” *Journal of Religion in Africa/Religion En Afrique; Leiden* 5, no. 3 (January 1, 1973): 198–234.

<sup>43</sup> Margaret Wangui Gachihi, “Faith and Nationalism, Mau Mau and Christianity in Kikuyuland” (Dissertation, University of Nairobi, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 229.

<sup>45</sup> As cited in Renison Muchiri Githige, “The Religious Factor in Mau Mau with Particular Reference to Mau Mau Oaths” (Dissertation, University of Nairobi, 1978), 33.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>47</sup> See Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs*, 143.

Mau Mau hymns picked up on these themes. They were harmonized to Christian songs, but the words were altered to promote the movement's cause. They spoke of an idyllic past before colonialism, emphasized cooperation among the local African population, and promoted the idea that land should be free to all people.<sup>48</sup> The songs also included a mix of biblical and traditional moral imperatives. They, therefore, promoted the central message of the movement while also engendering in-group solidarity and cooperation.<sup>49</sup>

How aware were the British of the Mau Mau oathing practices, religious networks, and forms of prayer? Most notably, the scale of the oathing practices ensured the British could not miss them. As early as 1950, colonial officials noted that "secret meetings were being held in which an illegal oath, accompanied by appropriately horrid ritual, was being administered to initiates to bind them to treat all Government servants as enemies, to disobey Government orders and eventually to evict all Europeans from the country."<sup>50</sup> A 1954 Council of Ministers Memoranda described the Mau Mau as "infected" with oaths.<sup>51</sup> Weekly telegrams from Government House to the Secretary of State for the Colonies often mentioned oathing ceremonies in their summary notes.<sup>52</sup> A background pamphlet was even provided from 1954 on by GHQ East Africa to fresh British troops arriving in Kenya that clearly outlined the oathing rituals.<sup>53</sup> Finally, security forces routinely estimated the number of witchdoctors operating in Mau Mau areas and noted their role in administering the oaths.<sup>54</sup>

This last fact hints at the religious connection the British attributed to oathing practices. A 1953 War Office is more explicit:

It is clear from the foregoing paragraph that secret oathing has been an ingredient in Kikuyu political activities for many years. This leads to the incontestable fact that, while the Kikuyu has advanced in many other ways, he has not yet broken away from the grip of superstitious, primitive ideologies which have ruled his life since the mystic past.<sup>55</sup>

Other reports referred to the oathing as "black magic" or further emphasized the role that witch doctors played in overseeing the ceremonies.<sup>56</sup> Secretary of State for the Colonies Oliver Lyttelton, for instance, wrote in his memoirs that the oaths were "methods of African witchcraft" and "the most bestial, filthy and nauseating incantation which perverted minds can ever have brewed."<sup>57</sup> Sir Philip Mitchell, who served as Governor of Kenya from 1944 to 1952, similarly recorded in his memoirs that "Mau Mau was...the death throes of the black and blood-stained forces of sorcery and magic, stirring in the vicious hearts and minds of wicked men."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Maina Wa Kinyatti, ed., *Thunder from the Mountains: Mau Mau Patriotic Songs* (Africa World Press, 1990).

<sup>49</sup> Gachihi, "Faith and Nationalism, Mau Mau and Christianity in Kikuyuland."

<sup>50</sup> As cited in Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 25.

<sup>51</sup> TNA FCO 141/5597: Council of Ministers Memoranda, Nov – Dec, 1954.

<sup>52</sup> TNA FCO 141/6488: Weekly Background Telegrams, 1953-54.

<sup>53</sup> See Susan L. Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and Colonial Counter-Insurgency, 1944-1960* (London ; New York: Mansell, 1995), 160.

<sup>54</sup> TNA FCO 141/5704: Appreciation of the Security Situation Likely to be Faced During the Period October 1, 1956 – March 31, 1957.

<sup>55</sup> TNA WO 276/234. Mau Mau Oaths, 1953-1954.

<sup>56</sup> Bodleian Libraries, Rhodes House, MSS.Afr.s.1676. (1): Papers Christie-Miller: Mau Mau Reports; TNA FCO 141/6589: Kenya: History of the Mau Mau; The Evolution of the Mau Mau Oath, 1958-59.

<sup>57</sup> Oliver Lyttelton, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos* (London: Bodley Head, 1962), 394.

<sup>58</sup> Philip Mitchell, *African Afterthoughts* (London: Hutchinson, 1954), 260.

While the British could not miss the oathing practices, they also did not know quite what to make of them. Accordingly, colonial officials relied heavily on social science advisors to collect and interpret information about these rituals. By 1954, the Colonial Office formerly established the Committee to Enquire into the Sociological Causes and Remedies for Mau Mau.<sup>59</sup> It was comprised of colonial administrators, Kikuyu representatives, and academics. One of the most prominent of the latter was anthropologist Louis Leakey. In his 1954 volume entitled *Defeating the Mau Mau*, Leakey wrote:

When to this religious aspect of the movement the great power exercised by the magical and mystical acts that accompany the actual oath taking are added, it is not difficult to see how it became possible to make so many normally peace-loving Kikuyu into fanatical, murdering maniacs that they have become under Mau Mau.<sup>60</sup>

Leakey concluded that the Mau Mau was a religion and owed its success to this fact more than anything else. The oaths, in turn, were creeds that affirmed faith in God, Ngai, and the chosen Mau Mau leaders.<sup>61</sup> He, consequently, advised colonial officials that "very serious consideration must also be given to the fact that 'Mau Mau' became a religion and that other beliefs must now be made available to take the place of Mau-Mauism."<sup>62</sup> The opening episode of this chapter demonstrates that colonial officials took him seriously.

While the oathing rituals attracted most of the attention of colonial officials, the British were not completely blind to the other two religious dynamics. Security forces, for instance, also monitored the Kikuyu independent schools. It is true that they were not aware of the full extent of those communities' complicity. But, they had their suspicions. Take for example the following recommendation of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1956: "The religious sects in the Province present no immediate security threat, but they should continue to be covered by Special Branch so that should any leader emerge, his activities would quickly become known."<sup>63</sup>

Finally, the British did not have the same sort of detailed data on Mau Mau hymns as they did the oathing ceremonies. Nonetheless, they were aware of their use and some of their content. One issue of particular concern was the insertion of Mau Mau leaders' names into the songs. For instance, Governor Baring wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1952 that "Kenyatta has allowed his name to be inserted blasphemously in hymns and prayers as part of the strongly anti-Christian movement which has gone a long way in some areas to empty Mission schools in favour of Kikuyu Independent schools and Churches, in favour of the Mau Mau religion."<sup>64</sup> Such worship deeply troubled the British.

To summarize, three key religious elements played a prominent role in the Mau Mau movement: oathing, religious networks, and hymns. This is not to claim the Mau Mau was a religious movement. Rather, that is the inference the British drew. As this section suggests, the colonial administration collected considerable intelligence on the oathing and other practices of the Mau Mau movement. And, they interpreted these activities as more than ethnic or nationalist rituals and aspirations. They were a product of deep religious convictions because "the African

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<sup>59</sup> TNA FCO 141/6582: Kenya: History of Mau Mau; pre-Emergency period; sociological causes of Mau Mau, 1954 – 1959.

<sup>60</sup> Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey, *Defeating Mau Mau* (London: Methuen, 1954), 52.

<sup>61</sup> Ngai is the Kikuyu term for God.

<sup>62</sup> Leakey, *Defeating Mau Mau*, v.

<sup>63</sup> TNA FCO 141/6822/29: Misc KIC Appreciations, 1956-7.

<sup>64</sup> TNA FCO 141/6594: Governor of Kenya to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 October 1952.

can and will not divorce politics from some sort of religious movement.”<sup>65</sup> While it is true that all colonial officials did not share this understanding, it was the majority view. And, it influenced how the British fought the Mau Mau in important ways.

## 5.4 British Response

Subversive, superstitious, tribalist, racist, anti-Christian, anti-European intimidating, brutal, criminal, committed to winning personal power for a few individuals and to establishing an ethnic tyranny – this is how a press statement characterized the Mau Mau shortly after the declared State of Emergency.<sup>66</sup> The long litany, however, captures more than a government trying to justify coercive measures. British officials developed a deep aversion towards the Mau Mau. This section explores how perceptions of the movements’ religious dynamics contributed to this repugnance and how it affected which policy options appeared more or less possible for resolving the conflict. As predicted by my argument, I find evidence that political and military elites focused on the death and destruction caused by the insurgents, not their calls for socio-economic and political reform. In addition, decision makers increasingly determined that a political settlement was unlikely to resolve the conflict. They, therefore, focused on a military, rather than political, solution.

### 5.4.1 Information Gathering

In 1967, four former Mau Mau leaders wrote, “British propaganda – and not only British – has been remarkably successful in equating the revolt...with barbarism and savagery, so much so that even many Africans in Kenya are today reluctant to discuss this vitally important episode in our history with candour.”<sup>67</sup> It is undeniable that colonial officials went to great lengths to publicly frame the Mau Mau as “an irrational force of evil”.<sup>68</sup> However, as in Cyprus, these were not merely instrumental efforts to justify exemplary force. Rather, they were rooted in a deep antipathy towards their opponents.

One important reason British officials construed the Mau Mau as so dangerous is because they fixated on the short-term consequences of the movement, rather than its long-term policy objectives. The correspondence bias embedded in their strategic culture brought the death and destruction of the group into sharp relief, even though according to the official record the Mau Mau killed fewer than 100 hundred Europeans and some 1800 loyalists.<sup>69</sup> In contrast, the British reported ten times that number of Mau Mau were killed in action, making the Kenya Emergency the British conflict with the highest insurgent to counterinsurgent casualty ratio of the postwar period.<sup>70</sup> Still, it was the Mau Mau violence that became the focus of the Emergency Period. Two events in 1953 well illustrate this point.

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<sup>65</sup> TNA CO 822/795/16: Rehabilitation of Mau Mau Adherents in Kenya.

<sup>66</sup> TNA CO 822/438: Press Handout, 29 October 1952.

<sup>67</sup> Donald L. Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau from Within: An Analysis of Kenya’s Peasant Revolt* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), 9.

<sup>68</sup> Frank Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective: Eastern African Studies* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>69</sup> TNA CO 822/1220: The History of the Emergency in Kenya, 1960.

<sup>70</sup> David French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 133.

The first concerns the most sensational murder of white settlers during the insurgency. Such attacks drew considerable attention, even though they were relatively limited. And, none garnered more attention than the Ruck family murder in January 1953. A rather typical example of a settler family, the father, mother, and a six-year-old child were hacked to death by their servants as they slept.<sup>71</sup> The gruesomeness of the murders, coupled with the fact the family was killed by those they knew and trusted, understandably caused much consternation in the settler communities.

It also disturbed the police forces, which were out in force in Nairobi the day after the massacre. Their primary objective, however, was not to deter further Mau Mau attacks. Rather, they halted traffic and instructed European motorists to attend a protest meeting in front of Government House.<sup>72</sup> They aimed to stir up, rather than quell, unrest. The memoirs of Ian Henderson, the Special Branch officer responsible for the capture of the Mau Mau leader Dedan Kimathi, sheds light on what they may have been thinking. He writes, the Mau Mau insurgents were as “savage, vicious, unpredictable as a rabid dog”; they were “fanatics who...enjoyed killing children and slitting open the stomachs of pregnant women.”<sup>73</sup>

The second major event of 1953 that illustrates British decision makers’ correspondence bias is the Lari massacre. Not long after the Ruck family murder, Mau Mau insurgents killed nearly 100 Kikuyu Home Guard officers and their families on the Lari ridge. Colonial officials insisted this was the result of a cold-blooded plan by the Mau Mau to punish loyalists.<sup>74</sup>

In hindsight, many analyses have compellingly argued that the killings were rooted in genuine grievances over land ownership.<sup>75</sup> They were a means to an end. However, there is no evidence that the British ever considered this a serious possibility.

A few weeks after the massacre, colonial authorities distributed pamphlets detailing the atrocity. These leaflets conveniently left out the fact that as many as four hundred Mau Mau insurgents were killed by security forces in reprisal attacks.<sup>76</sup> Those acts of vengeance are hardly surprising given the visceral reaction the attacks caused. For example, Kenya Police Reserve officers who saw the bodies at Lari reported they were physically sick. And, one concluded, “These people are animals. If I see one now I shall shoot with the greatest eagerness and killness and no hanging back.”<sup>77</sup>

After the Lari massacre, some Mau Mau leaders tried to do damage control. For example, General Kimbo, the head of one of the forest gangs, wrote to the district commissioner’s office in Nyeri that although the Mau Mau had been “ready to kill everybody from babies to old ones” they recognized now that this approach “is not good.”<sup>78</sup> His and other subsequent messages fell on deaf ears. The Lari massacre became “the definitive horror by which every other act of Mau Mau would be measured.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Elkins, 42-43; Anderson, 93-98.

<sup>72</sup> Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 95.

<sup>73</sup> Ian Henderson, *Manhunt in Kenya* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1987), 149.

<sup>74</sup> Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, 138.

<sup>75</sup> Bruce Berman, *Control & Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey, 1990), 349; Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective*, 122.

<sup>76</sup> See Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, 166. In addition, at least three hundred suspected Mau Mau members were tried and dozens of those convicted and hung for their presumed involvement in the massacre.

<sup>77</sup> Imperial War Museum Sound Archive: Accession No. 10224. Sir A. Swan, Transcript 29.

<sup>78</sup> TNA WO 276/399: General Kimbo to DC Nyeri, November/December, 1953.

<sup>79</sup> Fred Majdalany, *State of Emergency: The Full Story of Mau Mau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 147.



Consequently, the belief that the Mau Mau represented a “rapid return to the savage” became commonplace and few in the colonial administration were inclined to discuss the insurgency as a rational movement from this point on.<sup>80</sup> As the Secretary of State for the Colonies at the time, Oliver Lyttelton, recounts in his memories: “I recall no instance when I have felt the forces of evil to be so near and so strong. As I wrote memoranda or instructions, I would suddenly see a shadow fall across the page – the horned shadow of the Devil himself.”<sup>81</sup>

Because British officials were so fixated on the destruction of the Mau Mau, they disregarded its larger political objectives. Indeed, of all the cases explored in this study, British ignorance is most stark in Kenya. For instance, there is no record of any kind to suggest that Governor Evelyn Baring ever considered the Kikuyu people might have had a genuine social or economic grievance at any point of the conflict. Rather, from the time he arrived, Baring accepted uncritically that the Mau Mau was a completely illegitimate movement.<sup>82</sup>

In sum, the British fixated on the most dramatic and gruesome of Mau Mau attacks. Although rather limited, especially after 1954, this death and destruction captured British officials’ imagination. It both produced and reinforced the idea that Mau Mau insurgents were irrational fanatics. This would have important repercussions for how the British chose to respond to the movement.

#### **5.4.2 Strategic Preferences**

The British focus on Mau Mau violence led to more than merely derogatory images of the insurgents. It led officials in Kenya and London to infer that the group had maximalist objectives. And, this severely undermined any chance of a political settlement.

On the first point, British officials inferred that the Mau Mau sought to drive out not only the colonial administration, but also all European and Christian influences. Shortly after the declaration of a State of Emergency, a public statement directly claimed, “[The Mau Mau] encourages race hatred and is virulently anti-European and anti-Christian in character.”<sup>83</sup> Similar views persisted at all levels of the administration over the next four years.

Brigadier G.A. Rimbault, the Personal Staff Officer to Governor Baring, for instance, believed, “From its inception the society was violently anti-European and anti-Christian in character.”<sup>84</sup> The Secretary of State for the Colonies at the start of the conflict, Oliver Lyttelton, shared this perception, insisting the Mau Mau was “a strongly anti-Christian movement.”<sup>85</sup> A War Office report from 1953 expressed these sentiments in a slightly different manner. Based on interrogations of captured Mau Mau members, it concluded that the insurgents were motivated by the conviction that all the people in Kenya knew that “God also wants us to win.”<sup>86</sup> Finally, the official summary of the conflict published by the War Office added the Mau Mau was not just anti-Christian, but also “the worst enemy of African progress in Kenya. It has about it all the horror of the powers of darkness; of spiritual wickedness in high places.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> TNA CO 822/477: Commissioner of Police, Situation Appreciation for the week ending 1 April 1953.

<sup>81</sup> Lyttelton, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos*, 394-5.

<sup>82</sup> Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 33.

<sup>83</sup> TNA CO 822/438: Press Handout, 29 October 1952.

<sup>84</sup> Imperial War Museum, Private Papers of Brigadier G A Rimbault CBE DSO MC: Documents 1780.

<sup>85</sup> TNA FCO 141/6594: Governor of Kenya to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 9 October 1952. See also TNA CO 822/459: Text of a broadcast by Lyttelton in Nairobi, 4 November 1952.

<sup>86</sup> TNA WO 276/512: Interrogation Reports, 1953-54.

<sup>87</sup> TNA FCO 141/6417. Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau: Volume V, 16.

Despite these persistent and consistent claims, the Mau Mau never published a single document or released a statement that made these claims. Due to its decentralized organization, there was no uniform platform that the Mau Mau pursued. The majority of its objectives coalesced around those put forth by the Kenya African Union. The demands of this political organization headed by Jomo Kenyatta centered on economic and land equality, political representation, and independence. It never called for expulsion of all European farmers.

Nor did the Mau Mau see their movement as explicitly anti-Christian. In fact, many of the Kikuyu independent church followers who joined the movement saw the tenets of the Mau Mau and Christianity as compatible.<sup>88</sup> Both traditions provided solace to the oppressed and guidance for how to seek justice. The Mau Mau, therefore, sought more a way of life unencumbered by colonial influence, rather than a territory completely cleansed of foreign influence. And, it is perfectly plausible that the colonial administration could have discerned these facts for at least two reasons.

First, captured Mau Mau explicitly stated that violence was a means, not an end. One captive leader, for instance, confessed to Special Branch officers that the Mau Mau objective was “the achievement of more land and power of self-determination.”<sup>89</sup> He further explained what the Mau Mau movement hoped to achieve through armed resistance: “They [Mau Mau] do not consider this will be achieved by violence alone, but they firmly believe that those who are sympathetic to their cause can only succeed if Mau Mau continue to fight.”<sup>90</sup> This echoes the sentiment of General Kimbo after the Lari Massacre, who more or less admitted that the movement had gone too far. The Mau Mau leaders understood violence was a way to coerce their opponent, but it was not their end goal.

Second, not everyone in the colonial administration accepted the view of the Mau Mau as irrational and savage. Two prominent figures, in particular, resisted the predominant view of British decision making circles. The first was Sir Alan Lennox-Boyd, who replaced Lyttelton as Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1954. While Lennox-Boyd expressed some of the strongest cynicism about Archbishop Makarios III in Cyprus, he questioned whether the Mau Mau really had a maximalist objective.<sup>91</sup> The second important figure to insist the Mau Mau was a rational movement with political aims and a military strategy was General George Erskine.<sup>92</sup> His view is perhaps most clear in this summary of the oathing ceremonies that so bothered other officials:

Secrecy was necessary, hence oaths were administered. Money was necessary, hence the oath had to be paid for. The whole tribe had to act as one, hence oaths were administered forcibly. Discipline was necessary, hence judges and stranglers became part of the organisation.<sup>93</sup>

Erskine construed these and other Mau Mau activities as the types of tools used by any rebel organization. As such, he initially sought to employ a balance of force that might coerce the Mau

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<sup>88</sup> Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 171.

<sup>89</sup> As cited in Lonsdale, “Mau Maus of the Mind”, 416.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> John Lonsdale argues that the majority of the British army in Kenya shared their leader’s view. This seems to be a difficult view to sustain, however. Many officers and soldiers shared the predominant view of the Mau Mau as irrational savages. See Lonsdale, “Mau Maus of the Mind.”, 410; Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, 33.

<sup>93</sup> TNA WO 276/18: General Sir George Erskine dispatch. The Kenya Emergency June 1953-May 1955, 2 May 1955.

Mau to surrender. Too much violence would alienate those sympathetic to the British cause; too many restrictions on violence would hamper military effectiveness.<sup>94</sup>

Despite intelligence that suggested otherwise and opposition from a handful of senior administrators, the majority of British colonial and military officials saw the Mau Mau as pursuing maximalist objectives. Thus, the view of the Mau Mau as irrational insurgents driven by pseudo-religious beliefs that called for the removal of all European and Christian influences from Kenya persisted throughout the conflict. This understanding ultimately influenced strategic preferences.

As predicted by my argument, military force was the favored way to deal with the Mau Mau movement throughout the conflict. A 1953 meeting of the Kenya Intelligence Committee captures this sentiment nicely. Comparing the conflict in East Africa to the Communist uprising in Southeast Asia, the committee concluded, “there was more hope of breaking terrorism in Kenya by force than in Malaya.”<sup>95</sup> This view translated into policy choices.

Collective punishments, large-scale military sweeps, and offensive measures were a mainstay of counterinsurgency operations. Recall that Governor Baring authorized a major operation to sweep up Mau Mau leaders in Nairobi shortly after he declared a State of Emergency. This was a joint offensive by army and police forces. While rare in other British contexts, such operations were a pattern in Kenya.<sup>96</sup> Even with the arrival of Erskine, the military remained on the offensive, although the General imposed a discipline hitherto absent. When General Gerard Lathbury replaced Erskine in 1955, offensive operations further intensified and the Army pushed deeper into the Mau Mau forest bases. And, while all of these operations were being conducted, detention remained a centerpiece of counterinsurgency efforts. This is because “without detention, Kenya could not have turned the tens of thousands of sullen Mau Mau fanatics into useful citizens.”<sup>97</sup>

A preference for force against the Mau Mau underlined these and other operations. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Kenya Army Infantry commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Guy Campbell, noted in his diary that “The Kikuyu must be taught a lesson that will be remembered for generations and which will act as a warning to other tribes.”<sup>98</sup> A member of the Kenya Legislative Council shared these views. During a visit by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Michael Blundell strongly tried to convince Oliver Lyttelton that drastic action had to be taken, which included “shooting and a considerable number of deaths...it would clearly establish that force lay with the Government.”<sup>99</sup> Lyttelton did not act immediately on these suggestions, but he did express a clear belief in his memories that the rebellion needed to be crushed first, only then could political reform be considered.<sup>100</sup> It is fair to conclude from these representative figures that the idea that persuasion must be stiffened with “compelling force” was always in the background of the colonial administration’s mindset.<sup>101</sup> However, it was not the only factor that determined policy choices. And, it would be incorrect to state that the British never tried to reach a bargained solution with the Mau Mau.

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<sup>94</sup> TNA WO 275/524: Letter from Erskine to Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Redman, VCIGS, 28 October 1953.

<sup>95</sup> TNA WO 276/62: Minutes of the 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the KIC, 17 June 1953.

<sup>96</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, 13.

<sup>97</sup> TNA CO 822/1233: Detention of Persons under the Emergency Regulations in Kenya, 1957-1959.

<sup>98</sup> As cited in Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, 41.

<sup>99</sup> TNA CO 822/460: Minutes from the Meeting of Secretary of State and European Elected Members, held at Government House, 30 October 1952.

<sup>100</sup> Lyttelton, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos*, 397.

<sup>101</sup> Lonsdale, “Mau Maus of the Mind,” 414.

My argument captures a general preference for coercion. But, it also helps to explain why negotiations, which were pursued during Erskine's tenure, gradually appeared even less attractive. Indeed, one of the primary reasons Erskine was sent to Kenya was because Prime Minister Winston Churchill thought the "fibre, ability and steel" of the Kikuyu deserved to be acknowledged by an offer of terms.<sup>102</sup> He was uncomfortable with how Governor Baring responded to the outbreak of violence in October 1952. And, he saw Erskine's calm, pragmatic disposition as an important check on growing hawkish sentiment in the colony.<sup>103</sup>

Thus, several negotiation attempts were made during Erskine's time in command from 1953 to 1954. The correspondence bias of British decision makers' contributed to their failure in two important ways. First, because the majority of colonial and military officials remained skeptical of how reasonable Mau Mau members might be, they often pursued these as half measures.

Take the first major surrender scheme attempted in June 1953, known as "Green Branch" because insurgents were instructed to carry such an item to indicate their desire to surrender. The operation was initiated after the British received two notices from one of the most notorious forest gang leaders, Dedan Kimanthi, that expressed interest in an amnesty deal. The Kenya Intelligence Committee recommended that such a gesture seemed sincere and terms were offered.<sup>104</sup> They were anything but generous. Mau Mau members who surrendered would not be prosecuted for the capital offenses of terrorism and carrying arms, but they were liable to prosecution for murders and other atrocities.<sup>105</sup> The British thought this a fair deal because it would exempt those who had been "forced" into the movement, but who had not committed acts of violence. There was, of course, no guarantee the British would not later make accusations that were not true.

Unsurprisingly, only a handful of Mau Mau members capitulated during the first two weeks of the surrender period. It could not have helped that shortly before starting the amnesty period, army units engaged in two large-scale offensive operations in the Aberdares and Mount Kenya regions. The logic was that that this would further weaken the resolve of Mau Mau insurgents. It may have, instead, sent a mixed signal.

In any event, Dedan Kimanthi eventually sent a third letter to colonial officials, this time openly requesting negotiations to arrange a truce. The request was ignored.<sup>106</sup> The surrender terms remained extended for several more weeks, but fewer than 160 of the roughly 10,000 forest fighters accepted it.<sup>107</sup>

Another major surrender scheme was devised in February 1954 after the capture of General China. This Mau Mau leader was another leading figure in the Mount Kenya region, and one the British long sought to seize. During this detention, he helped to organize a mass surrender of Mau Mau fighters by sending personal letters to no less than twenty-six forest gang chiefs.<sup>108</sup> The replies from the senior Mau Mau leaders were positive and what became known as

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>103</sup> Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged*, 180.

<sup>104</sup> TNA CO 822/378: KICFA 11/53, 25 August, 1953

<sup>105</sup> TNA WO 276/2000: Emergency Directive no. 9, Surrender Policy, 28 July 1953.

<sup>106</sup> TNA CO 822/378: KICFA 12/53, 8 September 1953.

<sup>107</sup> Randall W. Heather, "Intelligence and Counter-insurgency in Kenya, 1952-56," *Intelligence and National Security* 5, no. 3 (July 1, 1990): 57-83.

<sup>108</sup> General China cooperated because he was offered a commuted sentence of life imprisonment for doing so. See Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, 136.

Operation Wedgewood was scheduled for 10 April 1954. It illustrates a second way that British officials' correspondence bias undermined negotiation attempts.

The capture of General China greatly boosted the morale of Army officers and soldiers. And, General Erskine expressed a great deal of optimism for Operation Wedgewood. He wrote to his wife, "The 'China' business is really most exciting. I have been in a state of high tension since we started this thing on the 14<sup>th</sup> Feb."<sup>109</sup> To ensure that his officers were equally excited and clear about the mission, he issued a directive that stated the primary objective of the China surrender scheme was to bring the Emergency to a quick end.<sup>110</sup> This was, unfortunately, an overly optimistic assessment.

Three days before the coordinated date of surrender, security forces unexpectedly ran across a Mau Mau gang during a sweep near the Gathuini Reserve. This encounter resulted in the death of twenty-five rebels, the capture of seven others, and the complete loss of trust in the British.<sup>111</sup> Again, colonial and military officials drew the wrong lesson from this episode. They attributed the hesitation of Mau Mau members to be the result of their oaths and other irrational beliefs. They never considered that the insurgents doubted British credibility.

In the end, amnesty deals and negotiation efforts came to be seen as dead ends. The attempts made by Erskine from 1953 to 1954 represent the exception, rather than the norm. Further attempts were explored in 1955, but they suffered from the same issues as early overtures. Most government and military officials agreed that the only solution to the Mau Mau problem was a military one. As the officially commissioned summary of the conflict concluded, "There can be no compromise, no common ground between Mau Mau and the rest of the civilized world. It must be utterly destroyed if the peoples of Kenya are to live together and build up their country."<sup>112</sup>

## 5.5 Alternative Explanations

The evidence provided in this chapter points to British perceptions of religious violence playing an important role in their decision to pursue a military, rather than political, solution to the Mau Mau Uprising. It is possible, however, that the strategic preferences of imperial officials were shaped more by rational calculations, than cognitive biases. Again, the extant scholarship on religious conflict intractability suggests two possible ways this may have played out.

One strand of research argues that religion provides the means for insurgents to fight longer and harder than they otherwise might. It is certainly clear that Mau Mau leaders recognized the value of the oathing ceremonies as a powerful way to mobilize the masses and build unity.<sup>113</sup> And, these oaths did play some role in holding the forest gangs together over nearly five years of fighting.

But, it is doubtful they served the strong role the British envisioned. A 1960 historical survey commissioned by the War Office summarizes that consensus view: "The strength of the Mau Mau stems from the fact that in the unscrupulous hand (of such a powerful demagogue as Kenyatta) it has achieved a unifying force by combining primitive tribal superstition and fear

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<sup>109</sup> Imperial War Museum: Erskine papers, letter from Erskine to his wife, 30 March 1954.

<sup>110</sup> Imperial War Museum: Erskine papers, Commander-in-Chief's Directive, no. 3, 8, March 1954.

<sup>111</sup> TNA WO 216/967: Short History of the Wedgewood Operation, paras. 9 – 14, 1954.

<sup>112</sup> TNA FCO 141/6417. Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau: Volume V, 97.

<sup>113</sup> Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs*, 97; Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning*, 25.

with political and economic aspiration.”<sup>114</sup> The Personal Staff Officer to Governor Baring echoes this sentiment; “Unfortunately the Kikuyu is so innately superstitious that once having taken an oath, even though unwilling, he is thereafter permanently bound by it, under fear of the most dire penalties.”<sup>115</sup> If this were true, we should expect fewer defections than actually occurred. Roughly 10% of Mau Mau fighters in the forest eventually accepting one of the amnesty offers, including prominent leaders like General China.<sup>116</sup> And, they did this in the face of a number of British actions that called into question the sincerity of the colonial administration to honor its commitments.

Those who did not surrender, often cited materialist, rather than ideational, reasons for their decision.<sup>117</sup> The Mau Mau provided protection and a better quality of life, at least in their eyes, than on the Reserves. In addition, internal discipline was not assumed due to the oaths. Rather, misconduct was addressed through corporal punishment and tribal courts.<sup>118</sup> Many Mau Mau members, therefore, remained committed to the movement out of pragmatic concerns, rather than a commitment instilled by tribal oaths.

As in Cyprus, the British overestimated the power of religious rites. The Mau Mau movement was never the uniform and unified fighting force they envisioned. It started as a decentralized network of cells. And, that is how they continued throughout the conflict. Moreover, they were subject to the same internal disputes and fractionalization as any other insurgent group, especially in the face of setbacks. Significant schisms, for instance, emerged between forest gang leaders as British Army units penetrated more deeply into the forest regions.<sup>119</sup> Thus, the Mau Mau exhibited much of the same internal squabbling of other insurgent groups in the face of mounting defeats.

If religion did not provide the means for the Mau Mau to fight longer than they otherwise might have, it may have provided the motivation. This is a second possibility suggested by the existing scholarship on religious conflict. Perhaps the Mau Mau members were as uncompromising as the British construed them to be because they saw the land of Kenya as sacred and indivisible?

It is true that Mount Kenya was considered sacred territory, and it did feature prominently in the oathing ceremonies and traditional beliefs of the Kikuyu people. The movement also sacralized the territory of Kenya to a certain extent. Kenyatta, for instance, argued, “the earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwell in or on it.”<sup>120</sup> And, the banuti oath did include a vow to “fight for our land, to shed my blood for it.”<sup>121</sup>

However, there is no compelling evidence that the Mau Mau saw the land of Kenya as indivisible, or that those that took the oath fought primarily out of a sense of sacred duty. It was an anti-colonial struggle, not an anti-Christian or anti-European one. Recall how the Mau Mau leader General Kaleba described the movement’s goals upon his capture. In his confession to

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<sup>114</sup> TNA FCO 141/6417: Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau: Volume I (Ch I-V), Ch. V, 97.

<sup>115</sup> Imperial War Museum, Private Papers of Brigadier G A Rimbault CBE DSO MC: Documents 1780.

<sup>116</sup> Bennett, *Fighting the Mau Mau*, 145.

<sup>117</sup> TNA WO 276/427. Operational Intelligence Papers, June 1953 – November 1955; TNA WO 276/463: Mau Mau Surrender Policy, January - February 1955; WO 276/454: Anti-Mau Mau Operations, March – November 1954.

<sup>118</sup> Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs*, 111.

<sup>119</sup> One of the most notable splits occurred between Mau Mau generals Kimanathi and Mathenge. For more on fragmentation within the Mau Mau ranks, see Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya*, 91.

<sup>120</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Traditional Life of the Gikuyu* (Nairobi, Kenya: East African Educational Publishers, 2015), 21.

<sup>121</sup> Clough, *Mau Mau Memoirs*, 110.

Special Branch, he emphasized that the objective was “the achievement of more land and power of self-determination.”<sup>122</sup> This view was also echoed through organizations affiliated with the Mau Mau movement, such as the KAU. Ultimately, these demands for land reform stemmed from social and economic grievances, not religious motivations. Accordingly, the Mau Mau movement was open to bargained solutions as evidenced, in no small part, by the overtures made by several forest gang leaders discussed above.

In the end, the conventional wisdom for religious conflict intractability provides limited analytic leverage to understand British perceptions and preferences towards the Mau Mau in Kenya. The religious dynamics of the conflict are not the only reason British decision makers expressed a persistent and consistent preference for a military, rather than political, solution. But, their correspondence bias did contribute to this inclination.

## 5.6 Conclusion

Religion attracted and repelled the British from Kenya. The missionary undertakings that accompanied new economic activities led to a vibrant colony, one that drew an ever-growing number of settlers throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Perceptions of religious violence contributed to a decision that British rule was untenable in the long term. Despite attempts at constitutional reform following the Mau Mau Uprising, the specter of the insurgency remained. The “horned shadow of the Devil himself” described by Lyttelton never quite disappeared. Many British administrators and settlers awoke after the Mau Mau Uprising in a land they felt they were only truly seeing for the first time. In the end, Kenya gained independence in 1963 and Jomo Kenyatta served as the new country’s first president.

As with the other cases investigated in this study, British decision makers’ correspondence bias towards religious violence is not the primary cause of this outcome. But, it did play an important role in determining how colonial and military officials understood their opponents and which policy options they saw as more or less effective for responding to these threats. Had the military reforms of Erskine been less effective and a military victory not achieved by 1956, it is unlikely the conflict would have ended then with a political settlement. Rather, the British demonstrated through both confidential and public statements at all levels of government that peace would come only after the Mau Mau movement was utterly destroyed.

This role played by state forces is an important, and often overlooked, part of the story of religious conflict. Insurgents are never the only actors that determine how such disputes end. Sometimes, they are not even the most important factor. In Kenya, Mau Mau oaths and other practices did influence the organization and conduct of the movement. But, they only went so far in promoting in-group solidarity, and they never defined the objectives of the group. The Mau Mau was an anti-colonial movement, not an anti-Christian or anti-European one. The Mau Mau Uprising, therefore, demonstrates perhaps the most explicitly of all three cases in this study each part of the causal mechanism that I argue links religious violence to conflict intractability.

Table 5.1 below summarizes that evidence. In East Africa, colonial spoke the most openly and frequently about a threat to civilization itself. They fixated on horrific, but relatively isolated, attacks. The labels affixed to those events, such as the Rucks family murder and the Lari Massacre, could not help but conjure up images of a group far more savage and gruesome

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<sup>122</sup> As cited in Lonsdale, “Mau Maus of the Mind”, 416.

than the Mau Mau movement actually was. Yet, despite having reasonable evidence that these were the exception rather than the norm, the majority of British policymakers inferred that the Mau Mau would stop at nothing to drive out Christian and European influences from Kenya. It was almost inevitable, therefore, that a compromise could not be reached. However, this was not for the reasons the British assumed. There could be no compromise with the Mau Mau because the British were unable to see such a possibility.

**Table 5.1: Descriptive Inferences for the Mau Mau Uprising**

Independent Variable	Causal Mechanism (Strategic Culture)		Dependent Variable
	Part 1: Information Gathering	Part 2: Strategic Preference	
<i>Religious Violence:</i> Oathing, networks, prayers, hymns	British officials focused on the destruction caused by Mau Mau attacks. They ignored, especially Governor Baring, the stated objectives of the group.	The Mau Mau movement was construed as anti-European and anti-Christian. The British focused on a military, rather than political, solution.	<i>Conflict Intractability:</i> British negotiation efforts were half-hearted. Had they not achieved victory in 1956, the conflict would have persisted.



## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

In June 1957, Eric Griffith-Jones, the Attorney General of the colony in Kenya, advised Governor Evelyn Baring, “If we are going to sin, we must sin quietly.”<sup>1</sup> This study suggests that similar advice would well serve insurgent groups that mobilize in whole or in part along religious lines. From Mandatory Palestine to Cyprus to Kenya, insurgents’ religious dynamics obscured their policy objectives and militated against compromise. British officials repeatedly fixated on the destruction caused by these groups. And, from those activities, they inferred the insurgents were less willing to compromise than they actually were. At least in these cases, the religious identities and practices of insurgents was more of a liability than an asset. The guerrilla groups would have been better off drawing had they been more inconspicuous about their religious characteristics. This concluding chapter considers this and other implications of my study.

It is divided into three parts. First, I summarize my argument and key findings. Second, I consider the extensions of my argument beyond the British context. Third, I discuss in more detail their consequences of my theory and findings for scholars, insurgents, and counterinsurgents.

#### **6.1 Summary of the Argument and Findings**

I have argued that states play a critical role in obstructing the peaceful resolution of religious conflicts. Drawing on insights from social psychology, along with religious and strategic studies, I presented a theoretical framework that explained how government elites construe religious opposition, how those views shift preferences away from compromise, and the conditions under which those assumptions should be most influential.

The starting point of my argument was that Western political and military elites perceive religious insurgents differently than other armed opposition groups. This is because religious violence has extremely high correspondence for decision makers. Rather than ascribe insurgent behavior to situational or environmental factors, government officials directly infer the motives of religious, but not necessarily other, guerrillas directly form their behavior.

I argued this correspondence bias is embedded in the strategic cultures of Western security communities because of prevailing secular biases in their societies. The institutional differentiation triggered by the Peace of Westphalia and the enduring “myth of religious violence” means that religious insurgencies today are seen as a freely chosen activity that deviates from social norms. Moreover, the mixing of religion and politics appears as a grave threat to social and political order. Other scholars have also noted how these secular biases shape foreign policy preferences, but they have been less explicit about the precise causal mechanism that accounts for this relationship and the conditions under which it should be most influential.

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<sup>1</sup> Griffith-Jones was referring to the detention camps that housed the tens of thousands of suspected Mau Mau supporters and insurgents during the Kenya Emergency. Despite British claims to employ only minimal force in East Africa and its other colonies, exemplary measures were often taken. See Ian Cobain and Richard Norton-Taylor, “Sins of Colonialists Lay Concealed for Decades in Secret Archive,” *The Guardian*, April 18, 2012.

To address this gap, I identified strategic culture – and within that set of ideas, correspondence bias – as an intervening variable that links religious violence to conflict intractability. Shared beliefs, assumptions and habits of behavior in national security communities give meaning to particular threats, in the first place. And, they make certain policy options seem more or less efficacious. Strategic culture, therefore, serves as a lens through which policymakers construe the intentions of religious insurgents and determine which strategies are more or less worth pursuing.

Ultimately, correspondence bias militates against compromise. It leads decision makers to fixate on the short-term consequences of insurgent violence and to infer that these activities stem from internal convictions to overthrow the status quo. Discounting their opponents' willingness to settle, policymakers feel they have no choice but to pursue a military victory. Thus, government and military officials succumb to a self-fulfilling prophecy that assumes religious insurgents have maximalist objectives, even when those opponents explicitly state their goals are otherwise. It is not that religious insurgents are necessarily unwilling to make concessions; it is that they cannot credibly do so.

Finally, I identified two conditions under which correspondence bias should most influence decision makers' interpretation and response to insurgents: (1) the saliency of religion in the conflict and (2) the level of familiarity a counterinsurgent force has with the confessional community that insurgents represent. As the first increases (i.e., religion becomes a more central issue in the conflict) and the second decreases (i.e., counterinsurgents face insurgents from a faith community with which they have had limited interaction in the past), military planners will become increasingly more likely to succumb to their correspondence bias.

The three empirical chapters in this study explored British counterinsurgency campaigns during the early postwar period; and they adhered to these conditions in varying ways. The case of Mandatory Palestine presented the British with a rather familiar religious tradition, but groups within the conflict drew on religion to varying degrees. The religious Zionist group known as the Stern Gang was construed through the lens of correspondence bias, while secular Zionist groups were not. In Cyprus, the saliency of religion varied over the course of the conflict. But, because British officials had limited familiarity with Eastern Orthodoxy, they interpreted EOKA through the lens of correspondence bias from the start of the rebellion. Those views further intensified as the complicity of the Church and Archbishop Makarios III became more obvious. Finally, in Kenya, the Mau Mau aroused the strongest antipathy. This was due, in no small part, to the fact that the British inferred the group was motivated by traditional religious practices they knew little about.

Ultimately, all three cases provide support for my argument. The British either doubted or completely ignored insurgent claims that they fought to protest unfavorable conditions. Instead, colonial and military officials inferred that religious insurgents sought to radically change the status quo from the consequences of their violence. This decision making process was shaped by a secular strategic culture that heightened the correspondence between insurgents' behavior and motives. And, it was most influential when religious demands represented a central incompatibility in the conflict and the British faced an unfamiliar faith tradition. Under these conditions, government officials inferred that their opponents had maximalist objectives, despite this not being the case. They, consequently, discounted the efficacy of a peace agreement for resolving these conflicts. They either undermined or spurned negotiation efforts, depending on the case.

## 6.2 Extensions of the Argument

My argument stands in stark contrast to the conventional view that insurgents alone drive the intractability of religious civil wars. I have not claimed that armed non-state actors are never the reason for protracted conflicts. But, my goal has been to shift the analytic lens to the other side of the battlefield. While my empirical focus has been the British context, there are reasons to suspect that my argument can apply to a broader range of cases. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the framework presented in this study should be most helpful for understanding modern counterinsurgency campaigns waged by Western states. More specifically, this applies to societies with legal and moral commitments to a separation of religion and state. These are the cases in which secular biases persist in society due to a shared historical experience.

Illustrative examples provided earlier in the study already suggest that correspondence bias might be quite influential in the contemporary American context. Islamist insurgent groups are portrayed in much the same way as Jewish, Cypriot, and Mau Mau fighters were depicted. Consider President Obama's remarks to the United Nations General Assembly regarding ISIS in September 2014. Prior to the expansion of military operations against the group, he argued, "There can be no reasoning – no negotiation – with this brand of evil. The only language understood by killers like this is the language of force."<sup>2</sup> Defense Secretary Mattis echoed these sentiments just this past year. In a May 2017 interview, he argued, "It [ISIS} is a threat to all civilized nations."<sup>3</sup> And, he clarified that the U.S. military was transitioning from attrition to annihilation tactics. When asked to clarify the latter, he described the tactics as a policy of surrounding ISIS controlled areas, and "once surrounded, then we will go in and clean them out."<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the cases examined in this study, however, it is more difficult to tease out whether contemporary American officials' statements represent authentic beliefs or are merely used to justify military action. In this study, I have relied heavily on confidential or private correspondences that expressed policymakers' views before public statements were made. As comparable data becomes increasingly available for U.S. decision makers, future scholarship might explore the degree to which their very public descriptions of Islamist groups match genuine preferences.

Similarly, Western European militaries should also have a strategic culture in which correspondence bias is active. Another promising area to further test my argument is, therefore, the increasing involvement of countries like France in efforts to counter Islamist movements in West Africa. It is interesting to note, for example, that France intervened far more quickly in Mali than the Central Africa Republic in 2013. The former involved Islamist rebels threatening to march towards Bamako. And, Francois Hollande expressed the danger these groups posed as follows: "Mali is facing an assault by terrorist elements coming from the north whose brutality and fanaticism is known across the world."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Remarks By President Obama In Address To The United Nations General Assembly," Washington, DC: Office of the Press Secretary, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> James Mattis, interview by John Dickerson, *Face the Nation*, May 28, 2017, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/face-the-nation-may-28-2017-transcript-secretary-mattis/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> "France confirms Mali military intervention" *BBC News*, 11 January 11, 2013.

Religious identities did not play a major role in the Central African Republic, at first. But, as groups increasingly divided along sectarian lines in late 2013, the French became more concerned. President Hollande curtly summarized one reason for this change of heart at the Elysée Summit for Peace and Security in Africa: “Inter-religious conflict can get out of hand and create behaviors and situations in Central Africa which so far have not been seen.”<sup>6</sup> The cost of inaction at that point was perceived to be too high, and France did eventually militarily intervene.

My argument may also extend beyond the American and Western European contexts. The examples discussed in Chapter 2 from the Second Chechen War suggest that correspondence bias may also shape Russian military decision making. Insurgents in that conflict, but not the more nationalist one that preceded it, were construed as having maximalist objectives. The Kremlin also continues to frequently refer to Islamist groups in the Caucasus as “a force of nature rather than a rational adversary with which it can bargain.”<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the ongoing conflict in the North Caucasus is not the first time Russian officials have expressed concern about religious insurgents in that region. Russia has faced religious insurgents since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the Murid War, for instance, Sufi communities and leaders played a major role in mobilizing resistance to Russian expansion into the region. Most notable was Imam Shamil, who gained a reputation for his near supernatural abilities. One officer describes the Imam’s contribution to an engagement in 1832 as follows:

During this fight he was stabbed with a bayonet. After jumping from an elevated stoop clean over the heads of the very line of soldiers about to fire on him. Landing behind them, whirling his sword in his left hand he cut down three of them, but was bayoneted by the fourth, the steel plunging deep in his chest. He seized the bayonet, pulled it out of his own flesh, cut down the man, and with another superhuman leap, cleared the wall and vanished in the darkness.<sup>8</sup>

This description is more colorful than that offered by most British officials in Mandatory Palestine, Cyprus, and Kenya. Yet, it expresses the same concern about the way religion can enable insurgents to fight with more resolve and lethality.

Finally, there are reasons to suspect that correspondence bias may influence decision makers outside even the American and European contexts. Secular views are not limited to just the West. Nor do Western countries hold a monopoly on the use of force against insurgents that mobilize along religious lines. For example, following an uprising led by members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria during the late 1970s and early 1980s, Hafez al-Assad ordered a scorched earth campaign against the town of Hama. Insurgent and civilian casualties were high and large portions of the city were destroyed. The Hama massacre has since been described as one of “the single deadliest acts by any Arab government against its own people in the modern Middle East.”<sup>9</sup> The Sino-Tibetan wars during the early and mid-twentieth century inspired an equally devastating response with approximately 85,000 Tibetan deaths and Lhasa’s three main

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<sup>6</sup> Françoise Hollande, “Elysée Summit for Peace and Security in Africa - Final Declaration,” December 7, 2013, <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/elysee-summit-for-peace-and-security-in-africa-final-declaration/>.

<sup>7</sup> Monica Duffy Toft and Yuri Zhukov, “Islamists and Nationalists: Rebel Motivation and Counterinsurgency in Russia’s North Caucasus,” *CONSEC working paper*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> As cited in Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: Liveright, 2013), 156.

<sup>9</sup> Robin Wright, *Dreams and Shadows: The Future of the Middle East* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 243-244.

monasteries (Drepung, Ganden, and Sera) damaged nearly beyond repair.<sup>10</sup> Chinese officials have not shown they are open to any more compromise with Uighur dissidents in recent years. Whether these decisions were influenced by correspondence bias or some other factor, such as regime type, is an exciting undertaking for future scholarship.

### 6.3 Implications

In the end, this study challenges the strongly held conventional wisdom that the negative elements of religious conflicts are principally due to the demanding and uncompromising nature of combatants' beliefs and identities. My argument and findings emphasize what we already know about civil wars more broadly – that conflict outcomes depend on the preferences and behavior of actors on both sides of the battlefield. This basic insight points to a number of theoretical, empirical, and policy implications.

Theoretically, this study makes three important contributions. First, it suggests the utility of establishing a research agenda on the role of state forces in religious conflicts. Too much of the extant scholarship looks at broad conflict patterns and attributes these outcomes solely to the beliefs and identities of insurgents. It may very well be the case that religious civil wars are longer, nastier, and more brutish than other internal conflicts. But, state forces may be responsible for a large part of the destruction. The Mau Mau uprising is a case in point. For every insurgent kill, counterinsurgents slew ten Mau Mau fighters. And, that does not include the tens of thousands of suspected Mau Mau supporters that were displaced during the Emergency Period. A disproportionate amount of the violence in that case lies with the British security forces.

How widely might this extend? Are the staggering figures from Syria really only the result of ISIS attacks? Hasn't the Assad regime been just as, if not more, ruthless? What of the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar? Security forces have allegedly opened fire on fleeing civilians and planted land mines near border crossings with Bangladesh.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army appears to be barely holding on. Does the latter group really bear full responsibility for the lethality and protracted nature of the conflict? I hope this study encourages other scholars to further explore how some of the more destructive elements of religious violence may have as much to do with the way state forces respond as rebel behavior itself.

Second, this study emphasizes the need to consider how political actors' perceptions of religion, not just religion per se, impacts conflict outcomes. Even if religion is a socially constructed concept, it still has meaning for modern political actors. Accordingly, I offer a framework for considering how other scholars might conceptualize religion as more than an objective or essentially contested concept. We can take the beliefs and attitudes of policymakers seriously. And, we can trace their impact on their preferences and policy choices.

Third, my argument and findings provide new insight into a central puzzle in the broader literature on civil war, which asks why counterinsurgents repeatedly rely on strategies of brutal force despite its inefficacy and options for bargaining. Civil war scholars typically overlook psychological and cultural factors that influence military planning in favor of rationalist explanations. However, if, as I suggest, insurgents that mobilize along religious lines are viewed

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Barnett and Shirin Akiner, eds., *Resistance and Reform in Tibet* (London: Hurst & Co., 1996), 189.

<sup>11</sup> "What Forces Are Fueling Myanmar's Rohingya Crisis?," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed July 14, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/rohingya-crisis>.

as especially threatening, decision makers may be more likely to identify the effective forms of response as brute force, rather than containment or negotiated settlement.

Empirically, this study suggests the value of archival research in uncovering intriguing new puzzles and comparisons. British counterinsurgency operations during the early postwar period suggest that many of the features that observers have seen as being peculiar to early twenty-first century insurgencies, can be observed in previous periods of conflict. Moreover, historical case studies of counterinsurgency operations offer exciting opportunities to collect and analyze the type of data government and military officials are unlikely to share about ongoing or recently completed operations.

Finally, in terms of policy recommendations, this study points to lessons for both types of conflict parties in civil wars. Insurgents should read a cautionary note to their reliance on religion. Guerrilla groups that instrumentally draw on religion may be incurring more costs than they realize or the academic literature suggests to them. Those groups that draw on religion because it is a constitutive part of their identity may reconsider how demonstrably they do so. If my argument is correct, insurgents may be better off keeping their religious motivations and practices discreet. They might still draw on religion to increase group cohesion and overcome social restrictions on the use of violence. But, when communicating their message more broadly, they might consider sanitizing their message so as to not invoke the correspondence bias of decision makers.

Counterinsurgent forces, in turn, would do well to be more cognizant of their biases. This will require more than merely collecting additional information about the religious dimensions of conflict. More personnel and data are not the full answer. Rather, security forces need to devise methods to filter this information through an objective lens. This might include mechanisms that enable decision makers to make their secular beliefs and assumptions about religious opponents more explicit and those that encourage the formulation and discussion of several alternative viewpoints to avoid confirmation and correspondence bias. The British failed to learn these lessons during the early postwar period. Contemporary forces can fare better.

To conclude, this study points to new theoretical and methodological possibilities for the study of religious violence and irregular warfare. It suggests the value of shifting our focus away from the rhetoric and violence of rebels to how government actors interpret this information. It highlights the important role that comparative historical analysis can play in better understanding contemporary Islamist conflicts. And, most importantly, it challenges us to rethink why some conflicts appear to be so intractable. States, not only insurgents, play a critical role in obstructing the peaceful resolution of religious civil wars.

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