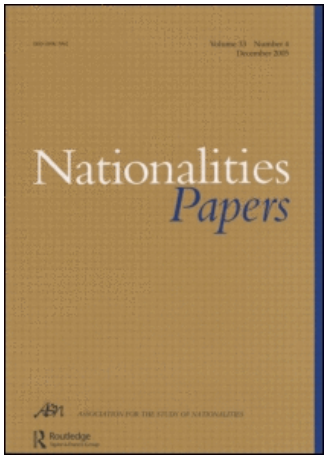

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Islam and Ethnic Conflict: Hypotheses and Post-Communist Illustrations*

Shale Horowitz

Introduction

The end of the Cold War drew increasing attention to ongoing and new ethnic conflicts—particularly because many of the high-profile new conflicts broke out amid the ruins of communism. Since 11 September 2001 there has been even more discussion about whether and how Islam contributes to international and civilizational conflict. However, there has been little work attempting to understand whether Islam plays any distinctive role in ethnic conflicts. Much work on ethnic conflict assumes that Islam is just one possible component of ethnic and national identities, and that it has no distinctive influence. Others examine whether Islam always has a similar impact on ethnic conflict—typically based upon identifying states or minority groups as having majority Muslim populations.[1]

Here the goal is to go back to the main theories of ethnic conflict onset, and to try to integrate Islam into the logic of the theories.[2] Ethnic conflict is defined here as a war between a dominant ethnic group affiliated with the state, and a geographically concentrated outsider ethnic group located within the state's borders, over rival claims to territory and political self-determination. Details of this definition are discussed below. After reviewing some distinctive political and geopolitical attributes of Islam, four main pathways of influence are examined: characteristics of ethnic and national identities and associated histories, disputes, and preferences; political institutions; international models and intervention; and economic development and structure. In each case, hypotheses are generated about whether and how Islam might function distinctively. The hypotheses are then illustrated and critically discussed using evidence from post-communist ethnic conflicts. Broad empirical tests of the hypotheses are left for future research.

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Islam, the State, and National Identity

Scholars have identified a number of distinctive political and geopolitical characteristics of Islam, as compared to other major world religions.[3] These include the following:

- Islam per se confers exclusive political and legal legitimacy on state authority. Its formal doctrine and influential early exemplars posit that state authority can only be legitimate by advancing Islam, and that there can be only one such legitimate state authority governing the Islamic community.
- The state's primary purpose is to serve a total religious mission. The state exists to enforce and perfect Islamic laws and norms within, and to spread this true Islam throughout the world.
- The state is largely unconstrained in its pursuit of this religious mission. The only significant constraints are those imposed by Islamic law on treatment of fellow Muslims. When it comes to non-Muslims, Christians and Jews are allowed a second-class status if they submit to Islamic state authority. Otherwise, the state authorities are free to do whatever they deem most likely to advance their religious mission.
- State leaders pursuing the religious mission may correctly assert divine authority. This right is related not just to the relative lack of constraints under Islamic law but also to the traditional understanding of Muhammad's perfection as a leader. Since Muhammad was a political as well as a religious leader, he was able to directly legitimize the morally problematic acts he felt it necessary to take as the first builder of an Islamic state and empire. Although subsequent regimes asserting Islamic authority have not claimed the same quasi-infallible status as Muhammad, they claim to carry on his legacy and mission and hence claim similar authority to do "what it takes" to be the final arbiters of what is legitimate.
- The rapid military expansion of early Islamic empires, along with Islam's slower spread through trade and migration, created a massive spatial and demographic footprint. Since these early centuries, it has proved impossible to impose one political authority over this diverse community of believers.

Some implications and consequences of these characteristics are as follows:

- Islam is per se not just a religion but a national identity that may take different forms. Islam is per se a collective identity that, in many forms, competes to be the legitimate unit of political self-determination.
- Islamic national identity claims to be universal—to be necessary and exclusive. It claims to supersede and ultimately to erase alternative sources of national identity, such as ethnicities, regional institutional structures and patron–client networks, and other religions. Those holding legitimate power have no right to appeal to any other collective identity.
- Islam's legitimizing authority, in practice, is ideologically contestable. While Islamic authority claims to be a necessary legitimizing tool for taking and keeping state power,

there are multiple versions of Islam, which overlap in every conceivable way with alternative sources of ethnic and national identity and political power (language, region, political and military institutions, clan and patronage structures, etc.).

- Islamic state power and authority is divided. Multiple Muslim state authorities may claim and compete for a theoretically exclusive Islamic legitimacy. Multiple Muslim states may compete to advance the Islamic mission—to control and purify the House of Islam, and to expand its sway into the House of War. Multiple Muslim states also use Islam as is convenient to maintain their power internally.

Islam and Ethnic Conflict in the Modern Nation-State System

While Islam may have certain relatively constant ideological, political, and geopolitical characteristics, its political impact and importance has varied dramatically over time. To a large extent, this variation is due to changing geopolitical, economic, and technological conditions or constraints. The modern international system of sovereign states is based on ideological legitimacy and material power derived from state representation and mobilization of national groups—typically built around core ethnicities understood to possess collective sovereignty and to be served by the state. Spreading out from Western Europe, the nation-state gradually supplanted the traditional system of competing empires. Thus, with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War, the last traditional Islamic imperial authority disappeared.

The modern state-system is based on sometimes contradictory principles of territorial sovereignty and national self-determination of dominant peoples. The dominant ethnic group is typically the core of the nation that claims the right to self-determination in a territory and through the institutional medium of the state. However, there may be one or more relatively large, territorially concentrated ethnic outsider groups, usually minorities, which might conceivably claim their own rights to territorial self-determination. Such outsider self-determination may be sought exclusively within the territory of the existing host state, or also in contiguous (or at least proximate) territory of one or more neighboring states. Ethnic outsider groups may also seek intermediate levels of political and territorial self-determination, involving varying combinations of cultural and political autonomy. An ethnic conflict is here defined as an armed conflict between a state representing one or more core ethnicities, and a geographically concentrated outsider ethnic group, which is fought over outsider ethnic group efforts to achieve or defend greater self-determination, and which produces a significant number of casualties over a fixed period of time.[4] Here ethnic conflicts in a core group/outsider group dyad will be "counted" where they produce 1,000 deaths, with at least 100 on each side, over a five-year period. This threshold is chosen to separate conflicts that involve sustained, organized fighting led by elites with significant resources from, say, more limited elite-level clashes, one-sided predations, or mass-level rioting.[5]

The standard list of factors taken to be important in explaining ethnic conflict relate to elite- and mass-level preferences, political institutions, international intervention, and economic development and structure.[6] These factors need to be examined in the context of a given ethnic dyad with the potential to engage in conflict over territorial and political self-determination. What are the goals and values of the core and outsider group leaders and constituents? How extreme or moderate are they, and how easily are they reconciled with those of the other group? For both groups, how do political institutions distribute power and structure political competition between the main organized elites holding or seeking power? For both groups, international intervention may influence both preferences and relative power. Economic development and structure are likely to predict governance priorities and success, and thus again both preferences and relative power. They are also likely to be correlated with different types of geographical location.

How does Islam affect the difficult process of reconciling territorial sovereignty and national self-determination in states with multiple, territorially concentrated ethnicities? Below, hypotheses are developed about how Islam might be expected to affect the main factors thought to produce or prevent ethnic conflict. With respect to preferences, Islam is a source of national identity for both core and outsider ethnic groups. It is associated with various histories of conflict and current rivalries over territorial and political self-determination. With respect to Islam, two main types of variation in political institutions are commonly discussed. One is Islamism, in which incumbent or challenger elites, whether of the core or outsider ethnic groups, seek to replicate an Islamic state based on the models of Muhammad and subsequent Islamic empires. An important control variable is democracy. Islamism is usually taken to make ethnic conflict more likely, while democracy is often viewed as an antidote to Islamism. International intervention is systematically related to Islam for a number of reasons. Since Islam is a competing national identity, there are potential affinities between cross-border ethnicities and states that go beyond ethnic kinship or narrow geopolitical interests. These affinities can make intervention more likely, not just by states but also by Muslim intergovernmental organizations and by nongovernmental organizations and movements. International Islamism has become increasingly important in recent decades, involving an increasingly complex mix of direct state intervention, state sponsorship of quasi-independent organizations, and free-floating, transnational organizations and movements.[7] The resulting general hypotheses are then applied to the conditions existing in the post-communist world, from the last years of Soviet and Yugoslav communism through the present.

Hypotheses about Identity

Consider first mixed Muslim/non-Muslim ethnic dyads. Where the state-associated dominant group in an ethnic dyad is Muslim, Muslim national identity is often

thought to lead to elite and mass preferences, political institutions, and policies that marginalize and threaten non-Muslim outsider ethnic groups. Where the outsider ethnic group is Muslim and the state-associated group is non-Muslim, outsider group national identity may thereby be strengthened, leading to more active development of the elements of separate identity and more active pursuit of political self-determination.

Greater strength and assertiveness of Muslim national identity may be due to more than one factor. It may be due to Islam's ideological emphasis on the religious community's exclusive national identity and purpose, which may reinforce any national tendencies of ethnic and civic elements of group identity. It may also be due to the history of ethnic conflict, in which previous regimes claiming Islamic legitimacy fought along the lines of current ethnic divisions. Owing to the historical character of Islamic empires, such previous conflicts are more likely to have been existential struggles—involving conquest, discrimination, and intense pressure to change identities—that left deeply scarred historical memories. Such conflicts may be more likely to give rise to ongoing disputes over territorial and political self-determination. Current threat assessments and levels of trust are also likely to be colored by such histories of conflict. This should be true both for Muslim and non-Muslim sides of ethnic dyads, and whether the state-associated dominant group is Muslim or non-Muslim.

If a history of conflict has a more powerful impact than Islamic political ideology, then the association between Muslim ethnicity and ethnic conflict should be more marked in regions where Islam spread primarily through conquest—such as the Middle East, Northern Africa, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central and South Asia. On the other hand, the association should be weaker, and possibly non-existent, where Islam spread primarily through trade and migration—in Eastern Africa and Southeast Asia.

Is there reason to expect that entirely Muslim ethnic dyads would be more or less prone to ethnic conflict than mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads? There are at least two reasons to believe that entirely Muslim dyads should be less prone to ethnic conflict. First, any history of conflict is more likely to have been "settled," in the sense that both groups have persisted while adopting a common Muslim identity. Compared to Muslim/non-Muslim dyads, it is more likely that common Muslim identity has facilitated secure coexistence. Second, Islamic political ideology claims that there should be no conflict within the Muslim community.

However, the latter ideology has an "internal contradiction." Islam also claims that there ought to be a single legitimate political authority representing the Islamic nation. Therefore, there is a historical pattern in which multiple Islamic political authorities, often forming partially or wholly along ethnic lines, have tended to fight each other for supremacy. To the extent that this tradition of seeking exclusive political legitimacy and control has influenced Muslim state authorities and outsider ethnic leaderships, it may increase the probability of ethnic conflict. As discussed below, this is more likely to occur where such state authorities and outsider ethnic leaderships have

Islamist ideologies, or secular analogues such as pan-Arabism. Muslim dyads may also be more prone to ethnic conflict where they uphold different Islamic sectarian traditions. In such cases, the history of conflict is less likely to be settled, and Islam seems less capable of acting as a basis for ethnic coexistence. In other words, Muslim dyads with different Islamic sectarian traditions seem more akin to Muslim/non-Muslim dyads than to Muslim dyads with a common sectarian affiliation.[8]

> Identity Hypothesis 1: If *Islamic identity and its ideological and political correlates* intensitfy conflictual tendencies, then ethnic conflict should be more likely in ethnic dyads where one group is Muslim.
>
> Identity Hypothesis 2: If a *history of existential conflict* intensifies the effects of Islamic political ideology, then ethnic conflict in partially Muslim dyads should be more common where Islam spread largely through conquest, compared to where Islam spread largely through trade and migration.
>
> Identity Hypothesis 3: If *ideology of Islamic unity and history of secure ethnic coexistence* outweigh *traditions of exclusive state legitimacy and control*, ethnic conflict should be less likely in entirely Muslim dyads than in partially Muslim dyads.
>
> Identity Hypothesis 4: In entirely Muslim dyads, ethnic conflict should be more likely where the groups identify with *different Islamic sectarian traditions* (Sunni versus Shia, Wahhabi/Salafi versus Sufi, etc.).

Hypotheses about Regime Type and Outsider Group Governance (Political Institutions and Political Competition)

If Islamist leaderships have power over the state, the outsider ethnic group, or both, ethnic conflict should be more likely. Islamist leaderships are ideologically committed to replicating some variant of the political systems of the early Islamic empires. This is likely to create a current threat or conflict similar to the historical conflicts already discussed, in which there is an existential struggle involving forcible subordination, discrimination, and intense pressure to alter identities. Such an existential struggle should more certainly occur in a mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyad. But even in an entirely Muslim dyad, an Islamist state will probably threaten the autonomy and vital interests of ethnic minorities, making ethnic conflict likely. Similarly, an Islamist-dominated outsider group in a Muslim dyad will tend to seek to impose its version of Islam, and the dominant group can be expected to resist. As compared to the case of an Islamist state, an Islamist-controlled outsider group is more likely to face an adverse balance of power, and to be deterred by it.[9]

Many have observed that, if Islamists are not in power, Islamism tends to gain ideological influence and institutional power under conditions of ethnic conflict.[10] Islamists are not as likely to do well during civil wars within predominant Muslim ethnicities. In ethnic conflicts, Islamists can present themselves as the more legitimate, dedicated, and efficient vanguard of the nation in the struggle against

outsiders—particularly non-Muslim outsiders or sectarian Muslim outsiders. In civil conflicts, by contrast, Islamists are fighting members of their "own" ethnic group, which is inherently less legitimate on both ethnic and Islamic doctrinal grounds. This is true for Islamists seeking control over the state, as well as Islamists seeking control over outsider ethnic groups. Therefore, Islamic "challenger" elites have frequently sought to bypass more cautious incumbent ethnic elites and to precipitate ethnic conflicts. The violence, disorder, and economic decline associated with such diversionary ethnic conflicts often seems more likely to enable Islamic "challenger" elites to destabilize incumbent elites than alternative strategies—such as directly challenging the incumbent elites by violent or non-violent means. Other types of challenger elites often do not have ideological and organizational characteristics that both legitimize ethnic conflict and enable them to thrive politically under such conditions. Of course, challenger Islamist elites cannot as easily initiate ethnic conflict as incumbent Islamists, because they are likely to have weaker organizational capacities and fewer resources, and because the incumbent elites may resist their efforts to initiate diversionary ethnic conflicts. Such incumbent elite resistance, however, is problematic, because the incumbent elites can then be branded as siding with the ethnoreligious other—usually "infidels" or Muslim "apostates." Of course, it is possible that non-Islamist incumbent elites will themselves choose to initiate ethnic conflict for diversionary purposes. Nevertheless, non-Islamist incumbent elites are less likely to be ideologically committed to ethnic conflict, and, being already in power, have more to lose if the conflict does not go well.[11]

What difference is made by democratic governance of states and outsider ethnic groups? Building on the democratic peace theory familiar in the international conflict literature, one would expect internal democratic dyads to be most peaceful.[12] However, compared to the analogous international democratic dyads, they are more easily "bypassed" by challenger elites from either the state or outsider group side. (Outsider group incumbents should be more easily bypassed than the state incumbents, due to the weaker "state" capacity of outsider group incumbent elites.) Thus, the democratic peace regularity should be weaker for internal ethnic dyads than for international state dyads. In addition, Islamist challenger elites seem more likely to gain strong footholds under authoritarian states or outsider group governance.[13] According to Institutional Hypothesis 3, this should further increase the probability that challenger elites will effectively pursue "bypassing" strategies. Thus, the combination of non-Islamist authoritarian governance and Islamic identity should make ethnic conflict more likely.[14]

> Institutional Hypothesis 1: In ethnic dyads where *Islamist leaderships* govern one or both groups, ethnic conflict should be more likely than in non-Islamist ethnic dyads.

> Institutional Hypothesis 2: In ethnic dyads where *Islamist leaderships* govern one group, mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads should be more prone to conflict than entirely Muslim ethnic dyads.

Institutional Hypothesis 3: In ethnic dyads where *Islamists form important challenger elites* for one or both groups, ethnic conflict should be more likely than in cases where Islamists do not have any significant political presence.

Institutional Hypothesis 4: In *entirely democratic ethnic dyads* where one or both groups are Muslim, conflict should be less likely than if one or both groups are governed by authoritarian institutions.

Hypotheses about International Influence and Intervention

Based upon common Muslim identity, there is significant international involvement of Muslim states and non-state actors in ethnic conflicts involving Muslims. Apart from influence through passive diffusion of ideological and institutional models, there is significant direct intervention by Muslim states and non-state actors. This intervention ranges from ideological and diplomatic solidarity, through various kinds of material support, to direct military intervention.

Such interventions influence both the ideology and the relative power of Muslim groups. Ideologically, they have tended to emphasize external and internal conflict over internal governance and developmental goals, and to create and legitimize secular authoritarian (especially pan-Arab) and Islamist models rather than democratic ones. In terms of power, they have increased the relative power of the Muslim and Islamist sides of ethnic dyads, and strengthened extremist competitors in internal struggles for power over Muslim ethnic groups. This is because Muslim sides of dyads are more likely to receive external assistance, because Islamist and otherwise extremist Muslim sides of dyads are even more likely to do so, and because conflict per se tends to favor extremists in competitions for group control. There is an opposite effect on non-Muslim intervention, particularly in mixed Muslim/non-Muslim ethnic dyads. Apart from those states with interests that are strongly threatened by Muslim group gains in particular ethnic conflicts, others tend to shy away from the potential costs of intervening on the "wrong" side of conflicts that may assume pan-Islamic ideological importance.

Since the Second World War, both passive influence and active intervention have become radicalized through elective affinities and "hybridization" between Western extremist ideologies and some variants of traditional Islam. This has produced a strong radicalizing influence over time, and an increase in specific interventions by states and non-state actors. Efforts should be made to measure particular interventions. But many are not easily measured, and may combine in complex ways. Such less easily measured interventions may be picked up by time trends and event-related breaks, which may be correlated with the increasing tendency of international intervention to contribute to ethnic conflict. Examples include rounds of decolonization wars; Soviet tactical efforts to play the "Arab" card, followed later by the internal reform and collapse of the USSR; regional destabilization efforts by prominent

pan-Arab leaders such as Gamal Abdel Nasser, Hafez al-Assad, and Muammar al-Gaddafi; post-oil boom international outreach and aid efforts by Saudi Arabia and its affiliated, quasi-independent Islamist organizations; Ruhollah Khomeini's takeover in Iran and subsequent efforts to destabilize ideological rivals; similar efforts by the Taliban and allied groups based in Afghanistan; and rising influence of transnational organizations and movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and its various offshoots. All such influences and interventions can significantly reinforce the effect of the identities and types of governance already discussed.

International Influence Hypothesis 1: International Muslim identity makes *state-level Muslim intervention* in ethnic conflicts involving Muslim or mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads more likely.

International Influence Hypothesis 2: International Muslim identity makes *Islamist states* more likely than non-Islamist Muslim states to intervene in ethnic conflicts involving Muslim or mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads.

International Influence Hypothesis 3: International Muslim identity makes *non-Muslim states* less likely to intervene in ethnic conflicts involving mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads.

International Influence Hypothesis 4: International Muslim identity makes *subnational and transnational Muslim institutions and groups* more likely to intervene in ethnic conflicts involving Muslims or mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads.

International Influence Hypothesis 5: International Muslim identity makes *subnational and transnational Islamist institutions and groups* more likely than non-Islamist Muslim ones to intervene in ethnic conflicts involving Muslims or mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads.

International Influence Hypothesis 6: Since the late 1970s, *Islamist regimes and Islamist subnational and transnational institutions and groups* have become more prevalent, so there should be a time trend of both greater international Islamist influence and greater international Islamist intervention in ethnic conflicts involving Muslims.

Hypotheses on Economic Development and Structure

Before moving on to a narrower discussion of post-communist ethnic conflicts, it is worth reviewing the two most well-supported economic control variables from the ethnic conflict literature. High levels of per capita economic development are associated with less frequent ethnic conflict. Presumably, this is due to better governance, higher state capacity, and benefits of location in regions with high concentrations of similarly rich states. Thus, economic development is associated with a complex of political and social conditions that counteract tendencies toward ethnic conflict.

There is an important qualification, though. Higher per capita wealth achieved through energy exports is associated with more frequent ethnic conflict. Presumably, this is partially due to the "resource curse," in which development is concentrated in

the energy sector, while the rest of the economy is stifled by state-based patronage networks and bureaucratic corruption. The government relies on its energy cash cow to dispense patronage and pay for state security, and fails to build strong economic and institutional microfoundations of legitimacy and support. Such states are also less likely to be located in regions with high concentrations of rich states. In addition, energy resources may be located where population groups have distinct ethnic and regional identities, making ethnically colored struggles over power and resources more likely. Thus, dependence on energy exports is associated with state characteristics and distributive cleavages that may reinforce rather than counteract tendencies toward ethnic conflict.[15]

> Economic Development and Structure Hypothesis 1: Countries with *higher per capita incomes* are likely to have better governance, greater state capacity, and location in better neighborhoods, which should make ethnic conflict less likely.
>
> Economic Development and Structure Hypothesis 2: Countries *highly dependent on energy exports* are likely to have poorer governance, lesser state capacity, additional sources of distributive disputes, and location in worse neighborhoods, which should make ethnic conflict more likely.

Hypotheses about Post-Communist Ethnic Conflict (Geography, Ideology, and Institutions)

The post-communist world includes a large number of potential ethnic conflicts, many of which involve Muslim groups. The former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in particular overlap with the northern borderlands of Islam. These regions have a long history combining high-stakes imperial and ethnic conflicts with religiously polarized identities. This goes back to the centuries of frontier warfare between the Ottoman, Austrian, and Russian Empires in Southeastern Europe, the Ottoman, Persian, and Russian Empires in the Transcaucasus, and various Turko-Persian empires and the Russian Empire in Central Asia. Over the last two centuries, it involved ethnic and national wars during periods of imperial decline before the First World War, with the consolidation of the Soviet Union during and after that war, and due to the breakup and reconsolidation of Yugoslavia during and after the Second World War. In national historical memories, these events re-forged ethnic and national identities by creating existential threats and defining grievances. On top of the historical conflicts, the Soviet and Yugoslav communist systems involved many uneasy and often contentious compromises among the various ethnic groups. With the decline and collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, many inter-ethnic disputes over territory and self-determination—hitherto "frozen" by Communist Party patron–client networks backed by the credible threat to use overwhelming force—were reopened. If Identity Hypotheses 1 and 2 above are correct, then post-communist ethnic dyads involving mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads should be more subject to ethnic conflict.

Muslim religious identity and practice was significantly weakened under communism. As a result, secular national identities of Muslim and non-Muslim ethnic groups, along with the associated histories of conflict and rival political and territorial claims, should initially have been the most important sources of potential ethnic conflict. There were not comparable long and bloody histories of conflict and conflicting claims in intra-Muslim post-communist dyads, so the post-communist ethnic conflicts should more frequently involve mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads. It is conceivable that intra-Muslim conflicts still might have developed over inter-republic boundaries drawn up during the Soviet periods, or over internal distribution of power and spoils. This was also made less likely by the combination of weak national identities and institutional advantages of republic-level communist parties. Where national identities were weaker, republic-level communist parties usually managed to keep political opposition marginalized in the last years of communism, and to create authoritarian regimes after the collapse of Soviet communism.

Here there is some reason to fear a repetition of what happened in the Arab world under the pan-Arab, secular-nationalist authoritarian regimes. Authoritarianism continues to marginalize more moderate opposition elements. This occurs against the background of increasingly potent international Islamic—and particularly Islamist—models and intervention. Over time, then, one would expect Islamists to emerge as an important opposition to incumbent authoritarian regimes. To the extent that this happens, it will increase the probability of ethnic conflict involving Muslim ethnicities with hitherto weak national and religious identities. Such conflicts are likely to involve entirely Muslim as well as mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads. To begin with, Islamists are typically well aware of the competitive advantages to be gained by instigating conflicts with non-Muslims. As Islamists approach and cross the threshold of regional or state power, they are more frequently involved in ethnic conflicts with fellow Muslims.

> Post-Communism Hypothesis 1: Given *the overlap of the communist space with Islam's northern imperial borderlands*, Identity Hypotheses 1 and 2 imply that a disproportionate share of post-communist ethnic conflicts should involve Muslim/non-Muslim ethnic dyads.
>
> Post-Communism Hypothesis 2: In Muslim successor states and autonomous regions, *initial institutional strength of Republic- and autonomous region-level communist parties* and *weak traditional Islam*, when combined with *weak secular national identities*, favored reformed communist authoritarian successor regimes. Initially, these factors made intra-Muslim ethnic conflicts less likely than ethnic conflicts between Muslim and non-Muslim ethnic groups.
>
> Post-Communism Hypothesis 3: Among Muslim ethnicities, *reformed communist authoritarian successor regimes* and *weak traditional Islam*, when combined with *weak secular national identities* and *international Islamic models and intervention*, should favor emergence of Islamists as important challengers to reformed communist parties. Over time, Institutional Hypothesis 3 and International Hypotheses 2 and 5 imply that this makes both Muslim/non-Muslim and intra-Muslim ethnic conflicts more likely.

Some Illustrative Post-Communist Examples

No effort is made here to measure relevant aspects of all possible ethnic conflict dyads in the post-communist world. Without such measurement, no strong conclusions can be drawn. Instead, the main examples of post-communist ethnic conflict are reviewed briefly to provide heuristic illustrations of the hypotheses. The reader will keep in mind that there are many more examples of dyads where ethnic conflicts did *not* occur, which are not discussed here. Consider first the identity, institutional, and international hypotheses related to Islam. There is then a brief look at the "control variables" of democratic institutions and economic development and structure.

A significant number of post-communist ethnic conflicts involved entirely or partially Muslim ethnic dyads. Without more systematic data gathering it is unclear whether ethnic conflicts involving Muslim ethnicities were a disproportionate share of the total. Even if ethnic conflicts involving Muslims did occur disproportionately, it would be important to determine whether this was still the case after controlling for other factors, and to determine what characteristics of Muslim identity are most likely to contribute to ethnic conflict. It does appear, however, that of the ethnic conflicts involving Muslims, a disproportionate number involved mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads rather than entirely Muslim dyads. Examples of Muslim/non-Muslim ethnic conflicts include those between Bosnian Muslims and Croats, Bosnian Muslims and Serbs, Kosovo Albanians and Serbs, Azeris and Armenians, and Chechens and Russians. The only example of an intra-Muslim ethnic conflict is the civil war in Tajikistan, which started as a more purely ideological conflict, but developed significant ethnic dimensions.[16]

The Muslim/non-Muslim conflicts were disputes over territory and self-determination, based on inconsistent claims related to current settlement and historical possession. While such rival claims are not a sufficient condition for armed conflict to occur, they are typically a fundamental enabling condition.[17] Given the existence of rival territorial and self-determination claims, histories of conflict often played an important exacerbating role. It is more difficult to make concessions and achieve trust with ethnic others associated with past existential threats. Sometimes these existential threats went back to the more distant clashes between Muslim and non-Muslim empires, as did those between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs, between Bosnian Muslims and Serbs, between Azeris and Armenians, and between Chechens and Russians. Often conflicts involving existential threats occurred within living memory, as did those between Bosnian Muslims and Serbs, between Azeris and Armenians, and between Chechens and Russians. It is worth noting here that recent existential threats also occurred in some non-Muslim conflict dyads—between Croats and Serbs, and between Abkhazians and Georgians.[18]

By contrast, in the cases of Muslim/non-Muslim conflict, it is noteworthy that Islamic religious identity was not typically an influential element in Muslim ethnicity or political legitimacy. The Bosnian Muslims are the main exception to this

generalization. The Bosnian Muslims' dominant party, Alija Izetbegović's Party of Democratic Action (PDA), embraced the long-term goals of making Muslims the titular people, and of giving Islam a formal role in defining the nature of the state. Given that Muslims were only a plurality in Bosnia, and at the same time demographically ascendant, this was highly provocative to the Croats and Serbs. However, it must also be noted that the PDA had a strong secular nationalist wing, which considered Bosnia to be a multi-ethnic state and which foresaw no formal role for Islam or any other religion. Most evidence indicates that the latter view was much more popular among the highly secularized Bosnian Muslim population.[19] Traditional Islam and Islamism made their most significant inroads after the onset of the conflict, and while the conflict lasted. Since the end of the war, political competition has pulled the PDA away from Izetbegović's Islamist leanings. Moreover, even if the PDA had been entirely secular and multi-ethnic in outlook, the current territorial and self-determination disputes, along with the history of conflict, would have made ethnic conflict with Croats and (especially) Serbs extremely difficult to avoid.

The only large-scale intra-Muslim ethnic conflict occurred in Tajikistan. It was rooted not in ethnic disputes over territory and self-determination but rather in transitional communist/anti-communist cleavages, and increasingly in factional and regional disputes over control of the central state.[20]

Thus, in the post-communist world, ethnic conflicts seem to have been more common in mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads than in entirely Muslim dyads. Moreover, the mixed Muslim/non-Muslim conflicts seem more due to secular-nationalist conflicts over territory and self-determination rooted in and reinforced by histories of conflict than to traditional Islamic religious identity or Islamic political doctrines of internal control and external spread. Recent histories of conflict in which one ethnic group was subjected to an existential threat—as with the Bosnian (and Croatian) Serbs, the Armenians, and the Chechens—seem to have been particularly important.

Islamists have rarely held much power or influence at the start of any of the post-communist ethnic conflicts. Again, one possible example is the Bosnian Muslim PDA. But this party should be seen as an Islamic democratic party, in which Islamism possessed significant but by no means dominant influence. A better example is the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) of Tajikistan, which never attracted significant support from the Tajik population as a whole. Its support was disproportionately rooted in outsider regional and ethnic minorities (particularly Gharmis). In the absence of the IRP, it seems unlikely that the opposition demonstrations and communist coup of 1992 would have been followed by a civil war. Probably, the opposition would have been crushed quickly and there would have been no organized entity willing and able to conduct an anti-government insurgency.

On the other hand, Islamists did tend to gain influence in long-running ethnic conflicts—as in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Tajikistan. Only in Tajikistan did the Islamists rise to dominate one side in a conflict, as secular nationalist and regionalist opposition

groups were eclipsed in the brutal engagements between government forces and IRP fighters. After fighting for a number of years, the IRP-dominated United Tajik Opposition decided to make peace with the reformed communist government. In Chechnya, Islamists did not acquire exclusive control over Chechen political and military structures, but they did acquire control over independent military formations and regional base areas. These Islamists played a significant role in initiating the second Chechen War. Although organized crime and kidnapping as well as Russian domestic politics were also important, the Islamists' determination to spread their influence and control into neighboring Caucasus Muslim communities made it difficult for the Russian state to tolerate their continued autonomy in Chechnya.

These contrasting strategies of Chechen and Tajik Islamists are not due to purely idiosyncratic factors. If taking internal power within the Muslim host group is the first and most fundamental goal of Islamists, then it seems clear that a diversionary war against non-Muslim outsiders is more attractive ideologically and practically than one against Muslim authorities and their local Muslim supporters. An "endless" brutal war against Russia is probably the surest way for Chechen Islamists to consolidate exclusive control over Chechen society. On the other hand, the Tajik Islamists were handicapped by their limited ideological appeal vis-à-vis Muslim rivals and their peripheral regional and ethnic base. They seemed to calculate, correctly, that their best chance lay in taking the long march through quiet, grassroots organizing under the prevailing reformed communist dictatorship. This comparison is consistent with the hypothesis that Islamist control or influence is more likely to lead to ethnic conflict in mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads than in entirely Muslim ones.

What impact did international Islam have on the pattern of international influence and intervention in the post-communist ethnic conflicts? Outside of Bosnia, international Muslim religious trends and models seem to have had little initial influence. The most significant interventions by Muslim and Islamist states and non-governmental organizations occurred after conflicts broke out, and varied in their extent and effect. One important exception to this rule is Tajikistan, where Afghan safe havens, material aid, and organizational models were probably a necessary condition of building and sustaining the IRP-led insurgency. Another significant exception is the second Chechen War. The first Chechen War allowed Islamists to set down strong roots, relying heavily on models, material aid, and volunteers from international Islamist non-governmental organizations and movements. As discussed, the "internationalized" Islamist elements in Chechnya were important in triggering the second Chechen War. Rather than alienate Russia, which is able and willing to strike back, Islamist and other Muslim regimes have stayed clear of direct intervention in Chechnya. In Bosnia, assistance from Turkey and later the US were crucial in limiting the wartime growth of Islamist influence. Here, international Islamist models and non-governmental involvement were reinforced by direct aid from Saudi Arabia and Iran. There is little evidence of similar international Muslim influence among the

Kosovo Albanians, largely because of their closer identification and relations with secular-nationalist Albania. Direct international Muslim and Islamist assistance to the Bosnian Muslims, along with broader ideological sympathy from the international Muslim community, played a role in isolating Serbia, and in spurring US-led Western assistance to Croatia, the Bosnian Muslims, and the Kosovo Albanians. Finally, it is worth asking why—outside of Turkey—there has been virtually no international Muslim sympathy for Azerbaijan, let alone direct intervention. The most important reason is that Iran, fearing Azeri nationalism within its borders, is hostile to the secular-nationalist regime in Baku. Largely for this reason, Iran has a tactical alliance with Russia and friendly relations with Russia's client and Azerbaijan's foe, Armenia. More broadly, secular-nationalist, generally pro-Western Azerbaijan is not a desirable poster-child for international Islamism, or more generically for the anti-Western diversionary purposes of Arab authoritarian regimes.

Tajikistan provides a final interesting example of international intervention. The intra-Muslim conflict stirred little interest in the larger Islamic world. Based upon Islamist ideological solidarity and regional ties, the IRP was aided by Afghan warlords. On the other hand, Russia and Uzbekistan intervened against the rebels. Both sought to prevent the spread of Islamism. Uzbekistan also viewed non-communists as a potential threat given Uzbekistan's large Tajik community. Later, Uzbekistan split with Russia by supporting a losing reformed communist faction that was traditionally closer to Tashkent and to Tajikistan's Uzbek community.

These examples appear to show that international Muslim and Islamist influence, sympathy, and intervention are conditional on a number of factors. Influence depends on there being a more compatible national identity, or on a military emergency that imposes dependency on outside aid. International Muslim sympathy is largely a function of publicity, which is in turn a function of whether the particular conflict is useful for internal diversionary purposes among insecure secular or Islamist authoritarian regimes. Islamist organizations and movements are likely to provide assistance to any Muslim ethnicity embroiled in conflict that is sympathetic or dependent on external assistance. On the other hand, secular and even Islamist-controlled Muslim states can be deterred from intervening even in ideologically convenient Muslim/non-Muslim ethnic conflicts—especially if Muslim outsider groups are fighting non-Muslim states with the will and ability to threaten the survival of the intervening regime. Finally, entirely Muslim conflicts such as the Tajik civil war do not stir pan-Islamic ideological solidarity and therefore are not useful for diversionary purposes. In such cases, intervention is therefore likely to occur based on regime interests in neighboring states. Also in such cases, because there is not likely to be pan-Islamic solidarity about the conflict, intervention by non-Muslim states is more likely than in mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyads.

During the late communist and early post-communist periods, Islamism did not have much influence among Muslim ethnic groups in potential conflict dyads. This appears to have been due to a number of factors: traditional communist restrictions

on organized religion; limited exposure to the non-communist world, including the larger Islamic world; and well-institutionalized communist parties.

In Muslim countries and republics, the most significant initial opposition to communist parties developed in Albania and Bosnia. These were both highly secularized communities, with extensive exposure to the outside, particularly Western world, and with relatively strong secular national identities. Among the former Soviet Union's Muslim republics, Azerbaijan comes closest to this pattern. These are the Muslim communities into which Islamism made the most limited inroads, even under difficult conflict conditions. On the other hand, where secular national identities and non-communist parties were weaker, and wartime conditions prevailed, as in Chechnya and Tajikistan, Islamists were able to build greater influence.

This pattern does not bode well for the future of the ethnically complex countries of Central Asia. Islamists are likely to gain influence under current reformed communist authoritarian regimes, which more effectively marginalize secular-nationalist and moderate Muslim political movements. Islamist movements will have an incentive to initiate civil wars with governments, foreseeing that the resulting disorder, economic decline, and ethnic tensions will increase their influence (as in Tajikistan). Such elements will have a strong incentive to strike at any non-Muslim presence, such as Russian or US bases, Western businesses, and ethnic Russian communities. Such attacks will tend to weaken the regime, without the image costs of striking at fellow Muslims. Going even further, association with foreign states or non-Muslim elements goes some way to making incumbent regimes the ideological equivalent of "apostates," thereby weakening the stigma against conflict with fellow Muslims.

What if any systematic influence was due to democratic institutions? In the presence of significant territorial and self-determination disputes, there is little evidence that the more democratic dyads of the former Yugoslavia did much to prevent ethnic conflict. Similar patterns are evident among the Armenians and in Georgia. In these cases, relatively democratic regimes or minority movements were willing to accept or initiate conflict rather than sacrifice important, seemingly attainable territorial and self-determination goals. It is not that democracies are less effective in resolving serious ethnic disputes. Authoritarian regimes might have preserved the status quo and hence avoided efforts to resolve these disputes. This would not so much have resolved the conflicts as postponed dealing with them. It is difficult to say which is more conducive to peace over the long run.

In the absence of serious disputes over territory and self-determination, democracies seem more promising as mechanisms to prevent ethnic conflict. But neither is democracy a magic bullet. Authoritarian regimes may directly and indirectly empower ethnic and Islamist extremists, thereby making ethnic conflict more likely. Democracies are less likely to do this by their internal policies, but they are unstable if they perform poorly and are located in "bad" neighborhoods.

What about economic development? The relative wealth of the former Yugoslavia was not a very effective barrier against conflict in the presence of serious ethnic

disputes over territory and self-determination. This relative wealth strengthened national identity and thereby tended to force experiments in reconciling inconsistent self-determination projects. On the other hand, it probably produced more competitive and effective leaderships, which made it easier to make progress toward resolving the extremely difficult disputes.

Energy dependence and the associated "resource curse" and regional rivalries over energy resources are potentially an issue for Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. Azerbaijan no longer rules over significant ethnic minorities. Some have argued that energy wealth, by increasing corruption and decreasing legitimacy in Russia, contributed to myopic diversionary uses of force in Chechnya. However, the role of energy in this particular chain of causation hardly seems vital, and is unrelated to many other contributing factors already discussed. Further discussion of energy export dependence is beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusions

The cases discussed cannot provide more than anecdotal support for the various hypotheses. However, a few preliminary generalizations seem to jump out. Post-communist ethnic conflicts seem to have disproportionately involved Muslim/non-Muslim dyads. Histories of overlapping ethnic and religious conflict and associated conflicting territorial and self-determination claims seem to have been the most potent underlying causes. Religiously colored, but nonetheless secular national identities were typically more important in championing these conflicting claims than were traditional religious identities or Islamic political ideology. Among Muslim ethnicities, Islamist influence seems to have made greatest inroads where secular national identities were weak, and where war provided a hospitable environment for international Islamist influence and intervention. In Central Asia, reformed communist authoritarian regimes threaten to allow a slower build-up of Islamist influence and organization, which would increase the probability of future ethnic conflicts—not only between Muslims and non-Muslims but also among Muslim groups.

As mentioned at the outset, existing theoretical and quantitative literature tends to characterize the role of Islam in ethnic conflicts in oversimplified ways. For example, looking at the share of Muslims in a country's population jumps to the conclusion that Muslim-controlled states are more likely to get into ethnic conflicts. But Muslim minorities might be similarly prone to do so under some conditions. Moreover, it has been argued here that histories of conflict and ongoing territorial and self-determination disputes are likely to be vital conditioning factors. More work should also be done to pinpoint internal and international conditions under which Islamist influence becomes significant.

Although the paper has focused on ethnic conflict onset, there has been some discussion of wartime conditions. This points to the need to build a similar set of

hypotheses about how Islam may influence the character and duration of ethnic conflict.[21] Does Islam, through the kinds of identity, institutional, and international mechanisms discussed, make ethnic conflict more intense and difficult to resolve? What is the relative importance of these mechanisms?

NOTES

1. Examples are De Soysa—who finds that Islam contributes to civil conflict—and Fearon and Laitin—who find that it does not. Many quantitative studies do not distinguish ethnic from non-ethnic civil conflicts. Nicolas Sambanis shows that this assumption is problematic. De Soysa, "Paradise is a Bazaar?," 395–416; Fearon and Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," 75–90; Sambanis, "Do Ethnic and Non-Ethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes?," 259–82.
2. For overviews, see Brown, "The Causes of Internal Conflict," 3–25; Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*; Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics*; Van Evera, "Hypotheses on Nationalism and War," 5–39; and Williams, "The Sociology of Ethnic Conflicts," 49–79. For evidence that religious polarization increases the incidence of ethnic conflict, see Reynal-Querol, "Ethnicity, Political Systems, and Civil Wars," 29–54.
3. See von Grunebaum, *Classical Islam*; Inayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*; Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism*; and Lewis, *The Middle East*. No effort is made to substantiate or refute these characterizations of Islamic political doctrine. The interest here is in specifying potential implications for ethnic conflict, and in beginning to assess whether there is historical evidence for the various hypothesized impacts.
4. On the importance of concentrated settlement patterns, see Toft, "Indivisible Territory, Geographic Concentration, and Ethnic War," 82–119.
5. Such a threshold is problematic in smaller states, where extensive, highly disruptive fighting may not produce more than 1,000 deaths. The criterion may be modified in such cases. Some scholars have developed scales of ethnic conflict that can be adapted to examine lower-threshold violence. See, for instance, Gurr, *Peoples versus States*; and Vanhanen, "Domestic Ethnic Conflict and Ethnic Nepotism," 55–73.
6. This is not an exhaustive list of variables, but rather a broad conceptual typology. Some factors may be difficult to classify in this manner. See, for example, the studies in n. 1.
7. Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics*, 173–212, provides an interesting early comparison between international communism and international Islam.
8. For some evidence, see Fox, "Is Islam More Conflict-Prone than Other Religions?," 1–24.
9. The cases of Muslim ethnic dyads in which both sides are governed by Islamists, or Muslim ethnic dyads of different sectarian traditions with Islamists controlling the state, seem likely to be similar to the case of a mixed Muslim/non-Muslim dyad with Islamists controlling the state.
10. See Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*. Also Rubin, *The Tragedy of the Middle East*.
11. See Miller, "Regime Type, Strategic Interaction, and the Diversionary Use of Force," 388–402.
12. See Maoz and Russet, "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946–1986," 624–38. Also Hegre et al., "Toward a Democratic Civil Peace?," 33–48.
13. See Varshney, "Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society," 362–98, but also Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*.
14. To be more precise, dyadic democracy has been found to restrict conflict, particularly in cases where levels of democracy are high. Highly authoritarian cases may be less prone

to ethnic conflict than regimes that are intermediate between high democracy and high authoritarianism. See the articles by Fearon and Laitin, Hegre et al., and Sambanis cited above.

15. On the economic factors, see Collier and Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," 536–95; and Ross, "What Do We Know about Natural Resources and Civil War?," 337–56.
16. There is also the conflict between Albanians and Macedonians, although this did not last long enough to produce large numbers of casualties. I exclude the case of Georgians and Abkhazians, because the latter are about half Christian Orthodox and half Muslim. The cleavage is not a religious one, because this would undermine the unity and security of the Abkhazians.
17. For a discussion along these lines, see Valery Tishkov, "Building Nations, Erecting Borders, and Shifting Populations," in this special issue of *Nationalities Papers*.
18. The recent demographic threat to Abkhazian identity was due to Soviet rather than Georgian policies. But Abkhazians viewed it as a Georgian threat because it was Georgians that were becoming a majority in Abkhazia, and because the threatening policies were instituted under the ethnic Georgian Soviet ruler, Josef Stalin.
19. See Burg and Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina*.
20. See Horowitz, *From Ethnic Conflict to Stillborn Reform*, 127–41.
21. For a discussion of why Islam and other religious identities may render ethnic conflicts more intense and bloody, see Christopher Marsh, "The Religious Dimension of Post-Communist 'Ethnic' Conflict," in this special issue of *Nationalities Papers*.

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