Peacemaking in Sacred Wars

The patterns of third party mediation in religiously defined conflicts

Isak Svensson

Uppsala University

Department of Peace and Conflict Research

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Abstract
The prevalence of religiously defined conflicts remains a potent problem of our time. Yet, little research has been done on explaining the conditions for conflict resolution processes in armed conflicts fought over religious incompatibilities. This is a theory-developing study that examines the potential explanations for why peacemaking occurs in some circumstances of religiously defined conflicts, but not in others. Examining the occurrence of international mediation in all religiously defined (intrastate) armed conflicts between 1989-2013, with data originating from the UCDP, I find that the degree of internationalization decreases, while the duration of conflicts increases the chances for peacemaking in religiously defined conflicts. Examining a set of case studies from contemporary peacemaking processes, from Egypt (Al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya), Algeria (AIS), Tajikistan (UTO), Palestine (Hamas), Afghanistan (Taleban), Thailand (Patani insurgents), Mali (Ansar Dine), Somalia (UIC), and the Philippines (MILF), reveals interesting variations supporting the notion that internationalization is the key in explaining intractability of religious disputes: 1) domestically (rather than international) oriented disputes are over-represented amongst the mediated ones; 2) domestically oriented factions (rather than transnationally oriented) within rebel-movements tend to be more open to engage in peace conflict resolution processes, and 3) in conflicts where internationalization has decreased over time, the parties’ readiness to engage in peacemaking processes have correspondingly increased. Taken together, the study shows that the costs of conflicts and the internationalization are indeed key factors accounting for the openness – or lack thereof – for conflict resolution processes.
Introduction

The prevalence of religiously defined conflicts remains a potent problem of our time. Even though the frequency of conflicts with explicit religious dimensions has remained more or less constant over the last two decades – hovering about 20 conflict dyads per year – they still have not decreased to a similar extent as conflicts without religious incompatibilities. Out of the seven most deadly armed conflicts in 2013, recorded by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), five were partly religiously defined (and all of them ‘Jihadist conflicts’): Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan and Syria. Thus, the international community seems overall less able to prevent, manage and resolve religiously defined conflicts, and the relative successes of conflict resolution processes in armed conflicts world-wide seem not yet to have translated into effective peacemaking strategies for sacred wars. It is important to study conflict resolution in religiously defined conflicts because we need to know more about under what conditions these types of conflicts can be amendable to conflict resolution processes. Given their prevalence, more knowledge about how effective conflict resolution processes can be designed is clearly needed.

The lack of peacemaking practices for religiously defined conflicts is in line with a relative lack of scholarly knowledge about these types of conflicts. Whereas numerous studies have been done on religiously defined conflicts – primarily but not exclusively Jihadist conflicts – through the prisms of either counter-terrorism / security, or theology, there is surprisingly little work done on Jihadist and other types of conflicts from the perspective of conflict resolution. One reason is that religiously defined conflicts are commonly seen as having a degree of intractability about them. They are usually interpreted as conflicts beyond the tools of conflict resolution practices, and therefore there is no apparent need to study them from this perspective either. Although it is at
this stage relatively uncontroversial to claim that religious conflicts are more intractable than other types of conflicts, we know less about why this is the case. Answers that have been provided in previous research include explanations relating to extended time-horizons or religious outbidding (Toft 2006; Toft 2007), indivisibility (Hassner 2003; Hassner 2009), civilizational identities (Huntington 1996), or ideational (‘cosmic’) warfare (Juergensmeyer 1992; Juergensmeyer 2000). Yet, so far, relatively little empirical work has been done to try to test and explore the empirical bearing of these explanations.

This paper tries to address the issue why religiously conflicts are difficult to resolve. It does so by setting out to, more precisely, focus on the research question: what are the conditions under which religiously defined conflicts are amendable to peacemaking processes? This paper will examine the pattern of mediation in religiously defined conflicts. It is an empirically informed theory-building exercise, setting out to examine which types of sacred wars (or rather, situations of sacred wars) that are open for conflict resolution processes in the form of third-party mediation.

Examining the empirical record of the occurrence of international third party mediation (defined broadly) in internal armed conflicts 1989-2013, the study finds that religious commitments seem to impede peacemaking processes, but that it does not make such processes impossible to come about. There is a significant difference between the prevalence of peacemaking initiatives in the form of third-party mediation, but the difference is not particularly dramatic, and there are quite a few of peacemaking instances in religiously defined conflicts. Zooming in on the group of religiously defined conflicts, the study finds that conflict duration increases, and internationalization decreases readiness to engage in peacemaking processes. Complementing the large n analysis, the paper also examines a set of contemporary cases of religiously defined conflicts, in order
to better identify the causal processes, including the cases of mediation efforts in from Egypt (Al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya), Algeria (AIS), Tajikistan (UTO), Palestine (Hamas), Afghanistan (Taleban), Thailand (Patani insurgents), Mali (Ansar Dine), Somalia (UIC), and the Philippines (MILF). These cases reveal three types of interesting variations supporting the notion that internationalization is the key in explaining intransigence of religious disputes: 1) domestically (rather than international) oriented disputes are over-represented amongst the mediated ones; 2) domestically oriented factions (rather than internationally oriented) within rebel-movements tend to be more open for engaging peace conflict resolution processes, and 3) in conflicts where internationalization has decreased over time, the parties’ readiness to engage in peacemaking processes have correspondingly increased. Taken together, the quantitative analysis and the case studies reveals a general explanatory trajectory where the international dimension of religiously defined conflicts seem to be they key in explaining the occurrence of peacemaking processes.

The paper is organized in the following manner. First I outline the main theoretical answers to why it is that religiously defined conflicts are difficult to resolve. Second, the study portrays the global picture through a statistical analysis of all religiously defined intrastate armed conflicts during the time period 1989-2013. In the third section, the main mediation efforts are described in short narratives, focusing on the conflict resolution process. In the fourth and last section, the conclusions – drawn both from the statistical analysis and the case narratives – are laid out.

**Why Are Religiously Defined Conflicts so Difficult to Resolve?**

Religious conflicts are exceptionally difficult to resolve. This is an idea that has significant traction inside as well as outside academia. Harpviken and Røislien identifies
as a ‘key insight’ that ‘even if religion plays a limited role in initiating a conflict, it can nevertheless play an important role in perpetuating such a conflict once the latter is under way’ (Harpviken and Røislien 2008:359). Many other scholars have shared this line of thought. For example, religious conflicts, according to Fox (2004:58), can be intractable ‘due to the non-bargainable nature of the motivations behind them’.

The conjuncture that religious conflicts are difficult to settle through dialogue, negotiations and other forms of conflict resolution processes is an idea that also has received substantial empirical support. Recent works have examined whether religious dimensions of armed conflicts make them more durable (Tusicsyny 2004; Horowitz 2009), more devastating for civilian population (Toft 2007), or more intense (Pearce 2005; Nordås 2010), and less like to be settled through negotiated agreements (Svensson 2007, 2012).¹

Less understood is why this is the case. In other words, why is it that some religious conflicts have parties who are open for conflict resolution, whereas other religious conflicts do not? There are several theoretical arguments / theories about the causes and dynamics of religious, and although none of them deal explicitly with the question of conflict resolution in religiously defined armed conflicts, it is possible to deduce propositions from their argument that can have bearing on, and help explaining, the occurrence of mediation in religiously defined conflicts. Hence, the ambition of this paper is to sketch out some possible explanations for the intractability of religious disputes, drawn on previous theories about the onset and occurrence of religious conflicts. One way of categorizing previous research is to relate it to the basic conceptual

¹ See also Toft (2007), who presents descriptive statistics indicating that the rates for negotiated settlement for civil wars where religion was central are lower than the average.
components of armed conflicts: the issues, the parties, and the behavior – the three components that is used to define armed conflicts (Wallensteen 2012).

Is it the issue?

One way of explaining the intransigence of religiously defined conflicts is to focus on the issue at stake. Public religious commitments to certain religiously defined positions of the parties relate to absolute values, from which it should be difficult to back down. Hasenclever and Rittberger (2000:119) argue that religious conflicts are difficult to resolve since the parties involved tend to perceive compromises as impossible. If parties have claimed divine sanctions for their engagement in violent interaction at the onset of the conflict, it should be difficult to engage in horse-trading, compromises, or integrative solutions later down the road. We could therefore expect that conflicts fought over religious issues in general should be associated with lower chances of engagement in conflict resolution processes.

Yet, the importance of the religious dimension in the conflict issue also varies across different conflicts (and potentially within the same conflicts over time). In some armed conflicts, the religious issues will be of central concern to the main controversy, whereas in other conflict situations, the religious issue will have a much more peripheral role. Toft (2007) has developed an argument that can be applied to the readiness to engage in conflict resolution in religiously defined conflicts. This is the model of religious outbidding, a theoretical model that focus primarily on explaining why religion become central in some conflicts but not in others. Political elites under threat and in need of external support can reframe the issue of contention in religious terms. Yet, and this is particularly important from the perspective of this study, once a religion becomes central, non-violent termination will also be less likely to occur (Toft 2007). Thus, if a
religious issue is central to the conflict, rather than marginal, then it is less likely that the parties are ready to engage in conflict resolution processes in religiously defined conflicts.

Moreover, the problem can also be certain ‘issue-bundles’: that religious issues are mixed together with other contentious issues and that it is this mixture of religion and other issues that makes conflict resolution particularly difficult in religious disputes. Hassner’s work on indivisibility is applicable in this context. Hassner focuses on sacred spaces, and not on religiously defined intrastate armed conflicts per se, as is the focus in this paper. Yet, his theory has wider ramifications and implications. It is particularly when the religious sentiments of conflicts are mixed with the territorial aspects of conflicts that these types of conflicts can take on an indivisible form, hindering the resolution of conflicts. He suggests that ‘although secular territorial disputes lack the inherent characteristics that produce indivisibility in sacred spaces, rivals increasingly come to perceive territorial disputes as indivisible as time passes’ (Hassner 2009:160). Thus, we would from this argument expect that territorial issues would be among the least open of the religiously defined conflicts to conflict resolution processes. In other words, we could expect that in those religiously defined conflicts that also concern territorial issues, conflict resolution processes would be harder to come into place.

Is it the parties?

A controversial and much-debated thesis relating to religion is Huntington’ theory of the clashes of civilization. His work is mainly focused on predicting the conflicts and main tensions that will arise following the end of the Cold War. Yet, it also engages with the question of resolution of religiously defined conflicts. Huntington (1993:298) predicts that the immutable and exclusive character civilizational differences will make such conflicts less amendable to compromise and therefore conflicts with participants from
different civilizations – ‘fault line wars’ – will not be settled through ‘comprehensive peace treaties that resolve central political issues’ (Huntington 1993:291), and by implication, mediated processes aiming for such treaties would also then be less likely to occur. Drawing on this line of thinking, we should expect that religiously defined conflicts with parties from different religiously traditions should be less open for conflict resolution processes.

Another explanation relating to the parties has to do with the degree of internationalization: if the fighting parties are supported by outside, external actors, and if such support implies that the domestic agenda is affected by the external actors. It could be the internationalization of religious conflicts that make them less likely to be open for peacemaking processes. This argument applies to religiously defined conflicts in general, and to Jihadist conflicts in particular. There are three reasons for why religiously defined conflicts that are internationalized to a high degree will be less likely to be open for peacemaking processes. The first reason is the ‘veto-player’ argument suggested by Cunningham (2006): more actors with ability to stop negotiated agreements will make such agreements and processes much more difficult and complex. This, of course, is not particular to religiously defined conflict: it would apply to all conflicts, including religiously framed ones. The second reason is that religious ideologies (in contrast to nationalist ideologies) are transnational to their character. This implies that religious revolts have propensity to spread beyond national borders and that transnational networks of religious militants have access and entry-points into originally local disputes. The third and final reason for why internationalization of religious conflicts makes them less likely to be open for peacemaking has to do with reputation costs for government coalitions, applicable to the context of the global war on terror. When governments are coalitions in the fight against militant Jihadist movements, then opening up negotiations
in one particular context may have repercussions in others.  

Thus, the internationalization of religiously defined conflicts can impede peace attempts on both sides of the conflict. We could therefore expect that those religiously defined conflicts that are internationalized in terms of external support and participation would have lower chances for conflict resolution processes than other types of religiously defined conflicts.

**Is it the behavior?**

The last way to explain the intransigence of religiously defined conflicts can be by focusing, not on the issues or the parties, but on the conflict behavior and the subsequent dynamics of conflicts. This relates to the underlying question whether there is anything different with religiously defined conflicts, compared to other armed conflicts. We know from previous conflict resolution literature that the intensity of the fighting as well as the duration of conflict would create incentives for settling the conflict through other means than armed. From a rational cost-benefit analysis, religious militants, just as other types of militants, would react to the costs of conflicts and were these to increase, their willingness to seek negotiations would correspondingly be enhanced as well. Thus, conflict intensity would increase the incentives for settling the conflicts and seek alternatives routes beyond the costly encounters on the battle-fields. Zartman’s (1995) work on ripeness in conflicts suggests that parties need to be incentivized by the costs of continuous engagement in conflict to be able to engage seriously in peacemaking and conflict resolution. Thus, belligerents in armed conflicts (religious as well as non-religious) should show an increased propensity for settling the conflict as the time passes. As time passes the war-weariness would increase (Mason and

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2 An example of this dynamic is the mediation attempts between Nigerian civil society actors and some (although disputed) representatives of Boko Haram, an initiative that was criticized internationally because of the risk of legitimizing Jihadist groups elsewhere.
Subsequently, the duration of conflicts and their intensity should be factors that increase the chances for peacemaking in religiously defined conflicts.

Yet, it may also be the case that religious militants are different than their more secular peers. Toft (2006) suggests that time-horizons can be applicable to explaining the longevity, intensity and intractability of religious conflicts. Religious militants, according to this argument, can be seen through the common rational choice perspective, but the rational choice theory needs to incorporate the fact that many religious militants have another assessment of time when engaging in fighting. The present is discounted, and the religious militants would thereby be ready to engage in a more long-term fashion in the conflict. The main explanation behind the longevity behind religious conflicts and their inability to be effected by conflict resolution attempts, should therefore be found in the religious actors’ perception that the current military confrontation is just an extension of a much longer battle, stretching over much longer (generational) time-eras. Following Toft’s argument, we would not expect the duration of conflict to have any effect on the chances of conflict resolution: religious militants should then not react to conflict costs in a similar way as other types of belligerents. Hence, whereas duration of conflict will increase the change for conflict resolution in general, it will not affect the readiness for conflict resolution in religiously defined conflicts.

Contrasting perspectives to the rational choice models are, of course, also possible. For example, Juergensmeyer (1992; 2000) suggests that religious violence should be understood from the militants’ ideological and religious frame. Violence performed in the sake of a religious cause is motivated from a wish to bring a divinely inspired order to the present disorder of contemporary society: religious militants are fighting a ‘cosmic battle’ between order and disorder. It is when this cosmic battle is mixed with the
political turmoil of the societies in which the militants exist that the basic underlying logic for engaging in sacred wars occurs. Juergensmeyer’s theory about cosmic battles does not explicitly discuss the conditions under which religiously framed conflicts are open for conflict resolution processes, yet, we would expect from his reasoning a close relationship between intensity of conflicts and the negatively likelihood peacemaking: it should be those religious conflicts that are perceived more in terms of cosmic battles that are both more intense and difficult to amend through negotiated processes.

Religiously Defined Conflicts and Conflict Resolution: The Global Picture

The discussion above has provided some tentative theoretical building-blocks that are useful in order to examine the occurrence of conflict resolution processes in religiously defined conflicts. In this study all religiously defined conflict between 1989 and 2013 are examined. By ‘religiously defined conflict’ the study means a religious dimension in the original incompatibility as explicitly stated at the onset of the conflict by the representatives of the primary parties. Examples include ISIS in Syria and Iraq, LRA in Uganda, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Hamas in Palestine, GAM in Indonesia (Aceh) and the Sikh uprising in India: thus, there is a quite broad variation within the category of religiously defined conflicts. It is, in their role of challenging the status quo, the rebel-side’s aspirations that are utilized in order to measure a religious conflict. Yet, that does not necessarily mean that it is the rebel side that is always making religiously framed demands, in some (but a minority of the cases) the religious aspirations are found on the government side, and the rebels are more secular-leaning (the relevant examples here are SPLM in Sudan, LTTE in Sri Lanka, the Maoists in Nepal and the MEK in Iran).

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3 For a detailed discussion about measurement of religiously defined conflicts, see Svensson (2012).
As it is the declaration at the onset of the conflict that determines whether a conflict is considered religious or not, the category of religiously defined conflict is constant over time. Change of positions within an existing rebel-group is not captured, however, which is, admittedly, a limitation with the present data structure. Ideally, we would prefer to have data on parties’ position that vary over time, but that does just not exist at present. The data-structure does nevertheless capture escalation of demands, in those circumstances when there are new rebel formations that express new aspirations.

The dependent variable in this study is third-party mediation, seen as an indication of a conflict resolution process. It is measured on the level of conflict-dyad-year, as mediators are accepted some times, and by some rebel-groups, but not by others. A broad conceptualization of mediation is utilized covering various forms of diplomatic intervention aiming to get the primary parties in conflicts to resolve their conflict and manage their differences.

Table 1. Distribution of mediation and religious incompatibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No mediation</th>
<th>Mediation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No religious</td>
<td>557 (73%)</td>
<td>210 (27%)</td>
<td>767 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious incompatibility</td>
<td>402 (82%)</td>
<td>91 (18%)</td>
<td>493 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>959</strong></td>
<td><strong>301</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,260</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 1, religiously defined conflicts seem to be associated with a lower degree of third party mediation compared to conflicts where there have not been made any explicit religious demands at the onset of the conflicts. Table 1 displays the number of religious conflicts, and how many of these that are mediated. The unit of analysis is
conflict-dyad, and seen on a dyadic perspective, there is overall a relatively low proportion of conflicts that are mediated.\(^4\) In fact, 18\% of the religiously defined conflicts are mediated, whereas the same figure for other types of conflicts are 27\%, clear although not dramatically different. This, of course, may be explained by cofounding factors, and therefore Table 2 controls for some of the main explanations for occurrence of mediation, relating to the nature of the conflict.\(^5\)

Table 2. Probit analysis of the occurrence of mediation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Probit regression</th>
<th>Number of obs = 1259</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wald chi2(6) = 19.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prob &gt; chi2 = 0.0033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log pseudolikelihood = -663.2283</td>
<td>Pseudo R2 = 0.0422</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Std. Err. adjusted for 301 clusters in DyadId)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Robust Med</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coef.</td>
<td>Std. Err.</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>P&gt;</td>
<td>z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relincomp</td>
<td>-.4264839</td>
<td>.1657147</td>
<td>-2.57</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>-0.7512788</td>
<td>-0.101689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RelID</td>
<td>.1569145</td>
<td>.204238</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>-.2433846</td>
<td>.5572137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IntensityLevel</td>
<td>.4282774</td>
<td>.1569145</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>.1207723</td>
<td>.7357824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territory</td>
<td>-.4230836</td>
<td>.1930838</td>
<td>-2.20</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>-.8023208</td>
<td>-.0454463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duration</td>
<td>.0021072</td>
<td>.0042757</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.622</td>
<td>-.0062729</td>
<td>.0104874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internationalized</td>
<td>.1212491</td>
<td>.1860751</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.515</td>
<td>-.2434515</td>
<td>.4859496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_cons</td>
<td>-.9799066</td>
<td>.1968902</td>
<td>-4.98</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>-1.365804</td>
<td>-.5940089</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 2, all intrastate armed conflicts are analyzed, and we can see that even after controlling for the main factors behind a conflict (intensity, duration, whether it was a territorial or governmental conflict, and whether the conflict was internationalized or not), the religious dimension in the incompatibility seems to be a factors that are negatively associated with the likelihood of mediation. Thus, contentious religious issues, on average, decrease the chance for peacemaking processes. Note, as well, that this does not apply to religious identities: that parties have different religious constituencies have

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\(^4\) There is not detectable increase in mediation activities over time. Although the institutions of mediation have increased immensely over the last years (Lundgren 2014), these efforts have not been directed to the religiously defined armed conflicts around the globe.

\(^5\) Note that this is focused on the demand-side of mediation, and the particular study has no explanatory ambition for the supply side, which will be dealt with separately in the eventual book manuscript.
no effect on the likelihood of peacemaking. The general pattern is instead that it is the religious issues that are negatively associated with the likelihood of occurrence of mediation. Sacred wars are less likely to be mediated and resolved.

Zooming in on the category of religious incompatibilities, we can start to examine variations within this category. Now the number of observations drastically drop (to 493 conflict-dyad-years), of course, as we are dealing with a sub-category of intrastate armed conflicts: only those that are religiously defined. Within this category, we can see that issues cannot explain variations in peacemaking: religiously defined conflicts where the religious issue is central (rather than a marginal issue) are not more or less likely to be open for mediation. Likewise, religiously defined conflicts over territory have no statistically significant relationship with the occurrence of peacemaking. When it comes to the identity of the belligerents, we can see that religious differences play no role at all in explaining chances for peacemaking. Yet, whether the conflict is internationalized or not, does have a significant and negative effect. Thus, internationalized religiously defined conflicts are less likely to be open for conflict resolution. This is a finding that we will come back to and explore in greater depth in the following narratives of peacemaking in religiously defined conflicts. Lastly, the behavior-dimension (and subsequent dynamic) of religiously defined conflicts seems to play a role: durability of conflicts increases their likelihood of being mediated. This resonates well with the broader picture of armed conflicts shown in other studies, that duration is an important explanation behind negotiated settlement, (Mason and Fett 1996) (although, interestingly, that proposition not find empirical support in Table 2 above). Intensity of conflict cannot explain variations in peacemaking in religiously defined conflicts.

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6 The standard errors are clustered on the dyadic level (as the observations are not independent of each other). This is arguably the most feasible level on which to cluster the standard errors. If we cluster them on the country-level instead, internationalization fails to be significant, although it is very close to meet the standard level (0.10) of statistical significance.
Table 3. Probit estimates on mediation in religiously defined conflicts

Probit regression

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Number of obs} & = 493 \\
\text{Wald chi2(6)} & = 15.37 \\
\text{Prob > chi2} & = 0.0175 \\
\text{Log pseudolikelihood} & = -218.91941 \\
\text{Pseudo R2} & = 0.0715 \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Std. Err. adjusted for 83 clusters in DyadId)

| Variable        | Coef. | Std. Err. | z     | P>|z|  | [95% Conf. Interval] |
|-----------------|-------|-----------|-------|------|----------------------|
| RelCentral      | -.1279942 | .3089404  | -0.41 | 0.679 | -.7335064 -.4775179 |
| RelID           | -.1050349 | .4193565  | -0.25 | 0.802 | -.9269585 .7168887  |
| IntensityLevel   | .2692727  | .2325904  | 1.16  | 0.247 | -.1865961 .7251415  |
| internationalized| -.6472678 | .2916386  | -2.22 | 0.026 | -.1.218869 -.0756666 |
| Territory       | -.7831862 | .4797142  | -1.63 | 0.103 | -.1.723409 .1570365 |
| duration        | .0243399  | .0101555  | 2.40  | 0.016 | .0044945 .0443034  |
| _cons           | -.9768904 | .4592036  | -2.13 | 0.033 | -.1.876909 -.0768718 |

In one alteration (not shown here), we utilized the category of Jihadist (defined in terms of Sunni Muslim group fighting for an explicit Islamic cause, where the religious issue is central to their concern). When not controlling for internationalization Jihadist conflicts are less likely to be mediated. Once internationalization is included in the analysis, the Jihadist factor fails to meet the standard threshold for statistical significance (yet, it is relatively close). Our interpretation is that Jihadist conflicts are among the most difficult of the religiously defined conflicts in terms of conflict resolution, yet it is primarily the international factor associated with many (but not all) of the Jihadist conflicts that accounts for the negative association between Jihadist conflicts.

To sum up, the global picture revealed by this analysis shows that religiously defined conflicts are less likely, overall, to be mediated. Inside this category, however, there are some interesting variations. It does not seem to be the religious issue that is explaining the variation within religiously defined conflicts in being open for mediation. Instead, whether the religiously defined conflicts are internationalized has a negative effect, and the religiously defined conflicts’ durability has by contrast a positive effect on the chances of peacemaking.
Cases of International Mediation in Religiously Defined Conflicts

This section examines a set of contemporary (post-1989) cases of peacemaking processes in religiously defined intrastate armed conflicts. The aim is to clarify the causal processes of conflict resolution in religiously framed conflicts. In this study, we have identified some of the main mediation efforts in religiously defined conflicts, although the list of the cases here is not exclusive.7

Table 2. Overview of the mediation in religiously defined conflicts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Religious dimension</th>
<th>Mediators</th>
<th>Religious mediators?</th>
<th>Outcome?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan – Taleban</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Demands for Islamic state</td>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mediation attempt fails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria – AIS</td>
<td>1994-1995</td>
<td>Demands for Islamic state</td>
<td>Sant'Egidio</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The government rejects suggested peace platform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt – Al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Demands for Islamic state</td>
<td>Muslim Brotherhood</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>The government calls off talks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel – Hamas</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Demands for Islamic state</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Cease-fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali – Ansar Dine</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>Demands for Islamic state</td>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Breakdown in talks, cease-fire violated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines – MILF</td>
<td>2001-2014</td>
<td>Independent Islamic Bangsamaro</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Peace agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia – ARS</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Holy war against the regime and Ethiopia</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Peace agreement, continued conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan – UTO</td>
<td>1994-1997</td>
<td>IRPs goal: Tajikistan united by Islamic principles</td>
<td>UN</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Peace agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand – Patani insurgents</td>
<td>2013-</td>
<td>Islamic Sultanate</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ongoing peace process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 Three other cases of religiously based third party actors mediating in religiously defined conflicts can be mentioned in this context: in 2004, Iraq’s top Shi-ite religious authorities including Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and al-Hawzah (a Shi-ite religious seminary) mediated the conflict between the Iraqi government and the Al-Mahdi Army, Ansar al-Islam and the Islamic State of Iraq. In the same year, members of three local Islamic Committees mediated talks between the Thai government and insurgents in Southern Thailand. In 2014 there were rumors that Nigeria’s government had negotiated a ceasefire with the Islamic group Boko Haram, something that was later denied by the rebel group.
**Egypt (Al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya)**

Al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya (hereafter al-Gama’a) was part of a militant and anti-governmental movement of Islamic groups in Egypt and the armed conflict that was active during the years 1993 to 1998. Al-Gama’a, the largest armed Islamist movement, started as a student rebellion association in the late 1970s, with the goal to make Egypt Islamic. They challenged the government for power in a rebellion in 1992, which in 1993 turned into an armed conflict (UCDP, 2014). Generally speaking, al-Gama’a consisted of two types of members – one group consisted of members recruited from Egypt’s universities and the other group consisted of war veterans from the Afghan war of independence, with strong connections to Afghanistan and al-Qaeda’s network. Between 5,000 to 10,000 young Muslims from around the world, including many from Egypt, had fought in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. After Soviet’s withdrawal the military trained Muslim soldiers looked for other battles in the Muslim world. Many sided with al-Gama’a. The group was behind many of the terrorist attacks in Egypt in the 1990s. They kept the ties with Afghanistan and al-Qaeda, and al-Qaeda provided significant support to al-Gama’a (Nedoroscik 2002:61-62).

A mediation attempt was launched by members of the ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ in 1993. While the regime fought against the al-Gama’a and other radical groups, the Muslim Brotherhood presented itself as an alternative moderate political force (Gerges 2000:600). The Muslim Brotherhood claimed to possess an intermediary role between the government and the militant Islamic groups, but in reality they had little control over the radical Islamic groups (Kepel 2003:284). In February 1993, the Muslim Brotherhood together with other independent moderate Islamists gathered a committee that offered to mediate between the al-Gama’a and the government. With the approval of some
government politicians, the committee contacted the imprisoned leaders of al-Gama’a. The mediation committee wanted to unify the entire Islamist movement under its leadership by closing the gap between the middle class adhering to the Muslim Brotherhood and the young urban poor whose alliance belonged to al-Gama’a. While the justice of the radical militant’s demands was acknowledged, the group would have to reject using violence (Kepel 2003:293; Ashour 2015:177). In state-owned and leftist media the attempt was described as ‘negotiations with terrorists’, which embarrassed the regime. Moreover, the former leaders of al-Gama’a had not supported the idea to completely stop using violent methods, and lacked an ideological justification from the historic leaders to de-legitimize the use of violence (Ashour 2015:177). Also, if the project to unite the Islamic movement had been executed, the government might have been seriously endangered. Thus, the government decided to confront the Islamist groups militarily. The Muslim Brotherhood was repressed politically and legally (Kepel 2003:294; Ashour 2015:177).

Thus, the mediation attempt of 1993 was never successful, and it was rejected primarily on the initiative of the government, which saw it as threatening to its position. The eventual end of the conflict was brought about not through mediation and negotiations, but through government repression in combination (and partly as a consequence) a dramatic ideological re-think of the organization’s basic tenets. The traditional leadership never gave up the underlying ambition of an Islamic state but re-evaluated the means of getting to that aim: the moral and ideological justification for the use of violence and one-sided violence (‘terrorism’) were changed, by the imprisoned leadership. There are indications that the two main constituencies of al-Gama’a – one internationally trained, and the other one domestic – showed different willingness to engage peacemaking
processes. The more extreme factions were also those associated with the international elements of the struggle.

**Algeria (AIS)**

The conflict between the Algerian military-led government and the political party the Islamic Salvation Front Islamist (FIS), and its armed wing AIS, raged between 1992 and 1997. FIS was founded in 1989 with the wish to establish an Islamic state (Viorst 1997:90). In 1991 FIS won an overwhelming victory in the first free government elections. Fearing that the Islamic party would take over, the military staged a coup d’état and cancelled the second round of elections. The leaders of FIS were arrested and the party was outlawed in March 1992 (Viorst 1997:91; UCDP 2014). The interruption of the elections paved way for armed Islamist violence, where AIS was one of the rebel groups. The early Islamist guerilla movement enjoyed a strong popular support and was in 1994 considered to be capable to overthrow the regime (Martinez 2004:15; UCDP 2014). While the rhetoric of the rebellion suggested an aim to overthrow the present state and to replace it with an Islamic republic, the aim of the mainstream of the rebellion was likely to force the regime to revoke the ban on FIS (Roberts 1995:240).

In November 1994, Sant’Egidio, a Catholic community in the Vatican, arranged a meeting in Rome, with an agenda to draft a peace plan. While the Algerian government declined to attend, most of the major Algerian opposition parties, including FIS, came to the meeting. The opposition parties had received more than 80 percent of the votes in the parliamentary elections in 1991. This was the first time that FIS agreed to sit down with Algeria’s secular parties and show willingness to compromise (Viorst 1997:96). In January 1995 the parties signed a proposal, ‘The Rome Platform’, which was perceived as an agenda to begin talks with the government. The main significance of the proposal was
the commitment to basic democratic principles and secured several major confessions made by FIS. The party distanced itself from the theocratic and anti-democratic positions it had advocated in 1989-1992 and publicly committed itself to democratic principles, such as political pluralism and respect for human rights and equality of gender. The platform also rejected the use of violence as a means of acceding or maintaining power. Taken together the promises given by FIS in the proposal sharply distinguished the party from the extreme revolutionary discourse of GIA, another armed organization, although some links remained between the groups (Roberts 1995:242, 2003:172-173). In the proposal all parties would be entitled to guarantees, an implication to the army, according to Roberts (1995), who described the Rome proposal a platform that offered ‘all sides of Algeria’s terrible drama an honourable way out’ (1995:242). The two other main Islamist groups, MIA and GIA, rejected the Rome platform and said they would continue the armed struggle. The Algerian government also rejected the platform, describing it as an unacceptable ultimatum (Ciment 1997:164). The Algerian army had seen the meetings in Rome as a threat as they feared the militarily more superior Islamists. Instead of seeking an agreement with the opposition parties the government wanted to maneuver FIS from the political scene through constitutional changes (Martinez 2004:18; Viorst 1997:97).

Martinez (2004:19) describes the Sant’Egidio initiate as premature. In 1994-1995 the army was threatened militarily and not willing to negotiate a settlement. At that point there was a dominant perception that the regime was collapsing. If the army had accepted the initiative, it would have looked like it capitulated to the Islamists. Martinez (2000:222-223) also presumes that the actors involved in the peace process did not understand the motives behind the Islamist actors in the war, for whom a political settlement would put and end to the ways they had received wealth and prestige. Instead,
the Rome platform can be seen as a last resort for political parties that had been marginalized due to the civil war.

Thailand (Patani insurgents)

The conflict in Patani, located in southernmost Thailand, is over a decade long and has its roots in Malay nationalist resistance to Thai rule (Wheeler 2014:319). The Malay sultanate of Patani is the leading center of Islamic learning in Southeast Asia and close to 80 percent of the population are Muslims. The cause for the insurgents is expressed in religious terms as a jihad, although religious scholars differ in their views on whether the conflict can be termed an armed jihad or not (Liow and Pathan 2010:42). After 2004 some analysts have found links between the Islamic insurgent groups in Thailand and external Islamic organizations, such as Al-Qaeda. To a large extent however, the conflict remains a local insurgency, linked to the ethnic Malay identity and not the transnational jihadist movements (Funston 2008; Wheeler 2014:319-320): ‘In Southern Thailand, Islam is a recourse that the militant movement mobilize for political ends: the violence is not primarily animated by religious grievances’ (McCargo 2008:180). Due to a policy to keep silent, it is unknown exactly what the group’s demands are. The structure of the militant movement and their leadership also remains unclear. This makes it difficult to define who could and should represent the militants in a dialogue process (McDermott 2013:123; McCargo 2014:5). A general commitment is to establish an independent Islamic state (Funston 2008:42). The Islamic schools play an important role in the insurgency. The schools have been associated with extremist Islamic teaching, such as Wahhabist and Salafi ideas, and Islamic teachers are recruiting and training insurgents (Funston 2008:30-31; McDermott 2013:126).
In February 2013 a peace dialogue started between the National Security Council (NSC) and the insurgents with Malaysia as facilitator. From the outset there were skeptical views towards the dialogue. Hassan Taib, a former rebel leading the insurgent delegation, was not believed to have the standing within the insurgent groups to represent them or to exert control over the fighters on the ground (Wheeler 2014:325). Most insurgents in the conflict identify themselves as ‘fighters’ (juwae) in small cells and not as members of the various Patani insurgent groups (McCargo 2014:4; Wheeler 2014:319). Furthermore, there are divisions within the broader separatist movement – many oppose dialogue with the Thai government and reject any compromise such as autonomy under the Thai constitution (Wheeler 2014:320). In the very beginning of the peace process, the insurgents set five demands for the talks, one demanding the government to recognize the independence and sovereignty of Patani Malay (Chingchit 2014). The government team, that did not bring any concrete peace plan to the talks, mainly focused on addressing the demands raised by the other side (McCargo 2014:7). The main outcome of the talks was the Ramadan Peace Initiative in July 2013, a voluntary agreement by both sides to reduce violence during the month of Ramadan. The initiative collapsed before the month had ended (Wheeler 2014:326-327). The peace dialogue run into challenges almost immediately and lasted only three rounds. A lack of genuine commitment and seriousness to engage in the talks by the representatives of both sides and the contested role of Malaysia as a facilitator contributed to undermine the process (Chingchit 2014; McCargo 2014). When the anti-government mass protests broke out in Bangkok in November 2013, the government put the peace process on hold (Chingchit 2014).
The conflict in Somalia started in the early 1980s, when armed opposition groups formed to overthrow President Siyaad Barre. He was ousted from power in 1991, and United Somali Congress (USC) formed a new government. Fighting however continued with involvement from other countries (UCDP 2014). Attempts to create a stable government since the fall of Barre’s regime have been largely unsuccessful. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) has remained relatively weak due to its inability to bring stability to the region. The influence of the TFG within Somalia was lessened as some regions in the north did not recognize its authority, and areas of central and southern Somalia have been controlled by Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (al-Shabaab), a radical Jihadist group. The TFG’s primary area of control has been in Mogadishu, which has been maintained by African Union troops. Islam is the most common religion in Somalia but the Somalis have in general shown a preference toward a more moderate Islamic influence within the government (Simpson 2009:31). The religious dimension of the conflict is focused on the way in which Islam is implemented in the running of the country.

In 2008 UN initiated a peace process between the TGF and Alliance for Re-Liberation in Somalia (ARS). ARS consisted of a coalition of disaffected MPs, Somali diaspora and former leaders of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) that wished to get rid of the government and the Ethiopian presence in the country (ICG 2008:i; UCDP 2014). In 2008, two agreements were signed in Djibouti in an attempt to resolve the political and religious incompatibilities of the conflict through power sharing between TFG and ARS. The first initiative was a joint declaration that focused on the question of Ethiopia’s withdrawal from Somalia. The second document was an agreement entitled the Decisions of the High Level Committee, Djibouti Agreement. The agreement provided a
framework for the establishment of a Unity Government, consisting of members from both the TFG and the ARS (UCDP 2014). The religious dimensions of the conflict were addressed in the agreements in three major of ways. First, by electing a president with Islamic credentials, the Head of the ARS (and one of the previous leaders of the ICU) Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, and by expanding the seats for ARS in the parliament, the government tried to ‘de-legitimize the al-Shabaab opposition’ (Moller 2009:5). Secondly, the Somali parliament voted to implement Sharia throughout Somalia as a concession to the rebels’ demands for Sharia law (Al-Jazeera 2009). While President Ahmed stated if would not be a strict implantation of Sharia (CNN 2009), the decision was an effort to take the mobilization argument from the radical Islamists. Government representatives explicitely stated that ‘the opposition hardliners would no longer be able to use Islam as a justification for attacking the government’ (Ibrahim 2009). The inclusion of Sharia law in the agreement caught the hardline al-Shabaab off guard as it aimed to undermine their insurgency. In order to re-justify their continued opposition the group shifted their rhetoric to frame Ahmed as a traitor (ICG 2010). Thirdly, the withdrawal of Ethiopia’s troops from Somalia from December 2008 to February 2009 (ICG 2010:6) decreased al-Shabaab’s rhetoric of a necessary religious struggle for national liberation away from the Ethiopian Christian influence (Moller 2009:5). However, following the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops, al-Shabaab quickly moved to fill the vacuum created and reframed their struggle as an internal conflict against the TFG (Albin-Lackey et al. 2010:15; Vidino et al. 2010:228). Al-Shabaab and other hardline insurgents and groups had not anticipated that the religious dimension would be addressed in the agreements. The result was a destabilization of the ideological cohesion of the movements. The support for their extreme measures faltered as their message became less clear. Divisions among al-Shabaab escalated (ICG 2010:1). Al-Shabaab thereafter moved towards a more global jihadist ideology and connected to international jihadist networks, which manifested itself
not at least through a different recruitment base: ‘Arguably the most significant (and visible) evidence to show this consequence of the sacralisation of the Somali conflict is the presence and growing profile of non-ethnic Somalis in al-Shabaab’s ranks’ (Vidino et al. 2010:228).

Peace agreements have not succeeded in ending the armed conflict in Somalia, but the government attempted to address the religious dimension of the conflict through power sharing and the implementation of Sharia in Somalia. This has desacralized the conflict, and solved some of the religious aspects. Thus, while the negotiated settlement did not succeed in ending the overall conflict, it did represent an effort to establish a partial resolution of the religious dimensions of the conflict.

The Philippines (MILF)

The main, although not only, separatist rebel-group in the Mindanao region in the Southern Philippines is the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). MILF is involved in one of the oldest on-going conflicts in the world, in a historically Muslim-dominated region in the south of the Philippines, with a historical trajectory dating back to before the formation of the Philippines as an independent state in 1946. The conflict is a state-formation conflict with, on the rebel-side, the Muslim minority community aspiring for independence in the South (Majul 1988; Islam 1998; Quimpo 2001; Buendia 2005; Lingga 2007).

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8 Mindanao is the name of a large island in the south of the Philippines and also of an island group consisting of the island of Mindanao and the nearby Sulu archipelago. The insurgency has been concentrated in the Sulu archipelago and a part of Mindanao island. For a historical background, see Majul (1988).
Peace talks between the Philippine government and MILF took place between 1997-2014, although this period had several break-downs along the way. Malaysia intervened as facilitator in 2001 and has been acting as the main mediator in the peace process between the parties, assisted by an international network of countries as well as international civil society organizations. MILF signed a comprehensive peace agreement with the government in March 2014. This agreement, the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, implied a formal ending of the intrastate conflict, although the implementation process will be a challenging endeavor. The agreement was a 'path that can lead to a permanent change in Muslim Mindanao' (America 2014), according to the President of the Philippines, Benigno Aquino. Although MILF is only one of several armed groups which is onboard the peace process, this agreement could potentially provide the basis for stability and normalcy, as well as for economic and political development, in the Bangsamoro region. Interesting to note is that those groups that are challenging the peace process, BIFM and Abu Sayaf, are also those most closely associated with the international Jihadist-networks, whereas MILF throughout the conflict (although maintaining contacts and certain acts of solidarity within the Islamic movement) never was a branch of the global Jihadist movement.

The comprehensive agreement on Bangsamoro created the autonomous, self-governing region of Bangsamoro, thus a new political entity. By agreeing to the framework agreement in 2012, the MILF laid down their original demands for a separate state, and conceded to accept some form of autonomy arrangement. Hence, the MILF backed down from its maximalist demands of independence through the creation of a separate state. Thus, the parties have agreed to the establishment of an autonomous governance system in the Moro-dominated part of Central and Western Mindanao, thereby recognizing Bangsamoro as the New Political Entity (NPE) in Mindanao. Also, the
MILF have agreed to demilitarize and decommission, through a gradual and phased process. A key dimension of the agreement is the ministerial form of government in the Bangsamoro region, which differs significantly from the general Philippine constitutional system with its presidential focus. Hence, the agreement that was reached created another type of governing structure in the region compared to the governing structure of the central government. Throughout the negotiations this was one of the key points, and it had some resonance in religious ideologies, since the MILF considered the ministerial form of government more in line with what they perceived to be a deliberation culture anchored in, and central to, their Islamic tradition. There is also agreement on wealth sharing and revenue generation, giving the Bangsamoro region, among other things, the possibility to generate revenues at the local level.

There are several reasons that can explain the readiness for the parties to engage in a mediated peace process, and eventually agree to a comprehensive agreement, including a shift in leadership on the government side, creating a momentum to find a solution within the term of the current administration (Aquino). There were also mutually enticing opportunities that were created through the possibility to exploit the region’s natural resources. Furthermore, a certain degree of learning might have taken place among the parties: the peace process was an exceptionally long and complex, suffering from several set-backs. The parties seem to have been able to adjust after these challenges and created conditions for a more robust process. Moreover, the dynamics within the wider rebel-movement can help to account for the readiness to engage in a mediated process leading to an agreement. The MILF was a challenger to the MNLF, lead by Nur Misuari, who engaged in the settlement of 1996, which partly due to the corruption and inability of the rebel-leader, was a disappointment for the separatists.
Tajikistan (IRP in UTO)

After Tajikistan’s independence in 1991 communist leaders continued to exert control over the country. Opposition parties unified to challenge the regime. In 1993 the opposition bloc formalized itself under the name of United Tajik Opposition (UTO). The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) was the most powerful of these. IRP’s goal was a Tajikistan united by Islamic principles. The other branch in UTO consisted of three secular-nationalist parties (McAuliffe 2006:2). IRP connected Islamic views with the nationalist identity in Tajikistan and was popular among a local regionalist faction (the Gharmis). The connection to national identities is a reason why the Islamist party was able to collaborate with the other opposition parties in UTO (Roy 2000:9-10). The war between the government and the opposition started in 1992. In the first years the conflict was fought by regional based militias, which supported either the government or the UTO (Torjeson and MacFarlane 2007:314).

In April 1994 a mediation process was initiated with UN as the mediator. The leader of UTO, Said Abdullo Nuri, and the Tajik president, Imomali Rakhmonov, participated from each side. (McAuliffe 2006:3). Initially IRP relied on a military strategy, but they eventually agreed to negotiate. According to Olimova and Olimov (2001:27) IRP came to understand that most Tajiks preferred secular political ideologies and resisted Islamism. While IRP’s goal initially was to unite Tajikistan under Islamic principles, the conflict had turned into a war between ethno-regional groups. In June 1997 a peace agreement was concluded. The peace agreement focused on power-sharing and was the first agreement in the region where the communist parties were forced to share power with an Islamic opposition. Opposition leaders were given 30 percent of the top government posts. In general, there was an emphasis on reintegration over demobilization and disarmament. Whole units of rebel forces were included into state military and the police force
Throughout the conflict Nuri had been dependent on regional military commanders with diverse interests and ideologies that needed to be considered before any agreements could be reached (McAuliffe 2006:6). Some of the groups did not accept the terms in the agreement and continued the fight. Among them are groups that established links with the Taliban, as they grew in strength in Afghanistan (ICG 2001; Torjeson and MacFarlane 2007:317). A Commission of National Reconciliation (CNR) was created to oversee the implementation of the agreement. An equal number of government and UTO representatives took part in the commission, which was chaired by Nuri, and a deputy from the government side (Jonson 2006:46). The peace agreement lacked some mechanisms for implementation that caused difficulties – for instance it was not spelled out how the 30 percent quota for UTO representatives in posts would be achieved (Goryayev 2001:37) Despite this, major provisions of the agreement have been implemented and overall Tajikistan's peace process is considered a success story (McAuliffe 2006:10; Torjesen and MacFarlane, 2007). The first few years after the agreement was reached the government tackled occasional outbreaks of violence from unsatisfied former commanders but in general the peace has largely held (ICG 2001). A major achievement was that the peace process facilitated a peaceful incorporation of Islamist movements into the constitutional political process. By 2000 IRP had become one of the biggest political parties in Tajikistan, and its members filled most of the government positions allocated to UTO (Olimova and Olimov 2001:27). When it comes to the relationship between Islam and the state, there are however still unresolved questions. Some high leaders in IRP rejected the concept of an ‘Islamic party’ and left it while other party members have used mosques and madrasas for political activities, contrary to the law on political parties (Olimova and Olimov 2001:27; McAuliffe 2006:10). In the process of becoming a legitimate political party, IRP lost most of its ‘Islamic’ nature and became a purely Tajik
party (Roy 2000:23-25). Instead, radical political interpretations of Islam have been spreading in Tajikistan. Since 1999 Hizb-ut-Tahrir has been the fastest growing organization in the region. The organization was made illegal in Tajikistan in 2001, and Nuri warned that the organization was a threat to both the country and to the IRP (Jonson 2006:159, 164).

**Afghanistan (Taliban)**

Since the 1970s Afghanistan has been characterized by civil war between various rival factions. In 1994 a group of Islamic students formed the Taliban movement and within two years the group had established control over ninety percent of Afghanistan. The Taliban administration collapsed in 2001, when a US-led coalition force intervened in Afghanistan (Roy 2010:16-17). Since the collapse of the Taliban government, the movement has waged war against the government of Afghanistan, supported by Western coalition forces. The movement is driven primarily by an Islamic ideology that in its essence seeks to establish a nation under a strict rule of Sharia law, helped by Pashtun nationalism (Sullivan 2007:103). The Taliban has demanded a withdrawal of foreign troops as a precondition for negotiations. Another precondition is the demand for delisting as terrorists and release of Taliban detainees (Brahimi et al. 2011:44; Giustozzi, 2010). Furthermore, in any peace talks the Taliban is likely to set demands for access to power in Kabul and the possibility to revise the Afghan constitution, which was passed in 2004 (Kane, 2015:2). The Karzai government likewise has a set of preconditions for negotiations: the Taliban should sever connections with al-Qaeda, disarm and accept the constitution in its current form (Brahimi et al. 2011:54).

In January 2012 the Taliban established a political office in Doha after Qatar had offered to serve as an interlocutor to initiate preliminary talks between the warring parties.
The Doha office was not recognized internationally as a representation of the Afghan Taliban, but was unofficially the stage for attempts at confidence building between representative from the US and the Taliban. It was not known to which extent the office in Doha was representative of the Taliban leader Mullah Omar and the insurgents (Sheikh 2013:10-11). The office opened officially in June 2013, but was practically closed within 24 hours. In the opening ceremony the Taliban raised their flag and placed a name plaque with the inscription ‘the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan’, a name that had been used by the Taliban when they came to power in Afghanistan in the 1990s. This angered President Karzai, who demanded the office to be closed and postponed a planned visit by the Afghan team to the Taliban representation in Doha. Karzai feared that the office would become a venue for the Taliban to represent themselves as an alternative to the Afghan government or a government-in-exile. After this incident, the office was closed and it is unlikely that peace talks will take place in Qatar in the future. Turkey or Saudi Arabia is regarded as more realistic options (BBC 2013b; Shalizi and Welch 2013). There is little guarantee that all insurgent groups would lay down their weapons with a negotiated settlement between the Taliban and Afghanistan, as the Taliban movement is a collection of semi-autonomous networks. When the Doha office was established, many Taliban fighters said they would reject any compromises with USA and the Afghan government made on their behalf. Other insurgents groups are also potential spoilers to any peace process between the Taliban and the Afghan government (Zambelis 2012; Sheikh 2013:11; Kane 2015:3).

Israel (Hamas)

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) was founded in the late 1980s as a religious-nationalist liberation movement. It has its roots in the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The transformation into Hamas, an organization with the specific mission
to fight Israel and create an Islamic state, came in 1987, when the Palestinian intifada erupted in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank (Hroub 2010:8-9). In the earlier statements from the organization the establishment of an Islamic state in Palestine was mentioned, but it was quickly sidelined into looking towards actual needs of the Palestinian people under siege. Instead of declaring ‘ultimate goals’, Hamas has turned into a movement that is more preoccupied with immediate and medium-term goals (Hroub 2010:18-19).

Egypt served as a mediator in the summer of 2014 when the conflict between Israel and Hamas intensified again. Egypt has been a key mediator between Israel and Hamas to end hostilities and reach ceasefires. Egypt has historical ties with Gaza and has been instrumental in persuading Hamas to sign ceasefire agreements in the past. Since the Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed in Egypt 2013, the Egyptian attitude towards Gaza hardened (Kingsley et al. 2014). After seven weeks of conflict, Egypt managed to broker an open-ended peace agreement between Israel and Hamas on August 26. It took two weeks of ‘extensive, continues efforts’ to reach an agreement, according to Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Badr Abdelatty (Al-Helou et al. 2014). The agreement included an immediate ease of restrictions on Gaza by allowing relief aid, assistance and materials for reconstruction to enter the area. Halting the violence was meant to be the first step, followed by a continuation of indirect talks between the parties aimed to alter the conditions of the long-term Israeli-Egyptian siege of Gaza, which was imposed after Hamas came to power in Gaza 2007. This had also been Hamas’ key demand for ending the fighting. The talks were planned to continue within a month and include matters such as building a seaport and an airport in Gaza and Israel’s demand that Hamas disarm (Al-Helou et al. 2014; Booth and Eglash 2014; Zahriyeh 2014). The ceasefire essentially brought the parties back to the terms agreed on the ceasefire signed in 2012 Gaza war.
New talks were set to resume in October, but they were postponed indefinitely (Daily News Egypt 2014). Israeli Prime Minister faced heavy criticism in Israel for negotiating with Hamas (Zahriyeh 2014). While the armed wing of Hamas, the al-Qassam Brigades, initially rejected the text of the ceasefire agreement, and declared that the battle would continue, the ceasefire has largely held after it came into place. The top Hamas leader in Gaza has insisted that they will not abandon their armed resistance against Israel and not disarm (Kingsley et al. 2014; Omer 2014).

_Mali (Ansar Dine)_

Since Mali’s independence in 1960 there have been four rebellions in the northern parts of Mali. In the latest conflict outbreak in January 2012, the predominately Tuareg rebels started the fourth rebellion, claiming to be fighting on behalf of all the ethnic groups in northern Mali, which they call Azawad (Lecocq et al. 2013:345; Gaasholt 2013:68; 2015:1; Stewart 2014:63). MNLA – a secular group fighting for an independent Azawad – took control over two thirds of the country together with Islamist groups, after Mali’s government had been overthrown in a military coup (Lecocq et al. 2013:346-347). MNLA fighters were driven out of northern Mali in the summer of 2012 as their goal to create a secular independent Azawad did not coincide with the goals of the Islamic groups. The Islamist groups imposed an extreme form of Sharia law in the region (Gaasholt 2013:69-70). As a response, UN authorized a military intervention in Mali (AFISMA) led by ECOWAS (Lecocq et al. 2013:344). Ansar Dine, a Tuareg Islamist movement, was formed by Iyad Ag Ghali in November 2011, shortly after MNLA had been established. Ghali failed to reform MNLA towards jihadist goals and therefore left the movement. The primary goal for Ansar Dine is to establish an Islamic state with Sharia laws in Mali or in an independent north. Ansar Dine has been able to combine
Tuareg secessionist nationalism with an Islamic ideology (Gaasholt 2013:70; Lecocq et al. 2013:346, Klute 2013:62-63).

In 2012 negotiations took place between Ansar Dine and the government, with the ECOWAS-appointed mediator Burkinabe President Blaise Compaoré. ECOWAS also led negotiations with MNLA. AQIM and MUJAO, the other two major armed Islamist groups, were not considered to be credible partners for negotiations – they were listed as terrorist groups and did not seem to want to negotiate with any agencies external to northern Mali (Gaasholt 2013:86). It is primarily AQIM that has links to other Jihadist groups in Libya, Somalia, Yemen and elsewhere (Arieff 2014:14). While Ansar Dine wants to locate itself within a strategically relevant global Islamist discourse, they do not wish to get the pariah status that is given to openly al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, in order to allow for potential engagement at the national level (Dowd and Raleigh 2013:6). Ansar Dine was initially reluctant to engage in talks with the regime. A long process of separate consultations with Compaoré preceded the negotiations. In these consultations the Foreign Minister of Burkina Faso, Djibril Bassolé, made clear that the negotiation process would be dependent on Ansar Dine’s willingness to sever all ties to AQIM (UCDP 2014). In November the official mediation process continued in Ouagadougou, as well as unofficial talks in Algiers, where Iyad Ag Ghali was rumored to be present (UCDP 2014). Key questions, such as Ansar Dine’s demand to impose Sharia throughout the whole country and the possibility of some kind of autonomy solution were discussed in Ouagadougou. In November an envoy of Ansar Dine, Mohamed Aharid, met with Compaoré, and declared that the group ‘rejects all forms of extremism and terrorism’ – a clear reference to the demands for their breaking of ties with AQIM and MUJAO. The group also states that it was willing to renounce its goal of imposing Sharia throughout the country, only insisting to keep its stronghold of Kidal. There were
doubts about the sincerity of Ansar Dine’s promise to fight extremists and terrorists – many analysts argue that the wish to start negotiations and the statement were linked to the plans of international military interventions (Pflanz 2012; UCDP 2014). In December 2012 Ansar Dine and MNLA met with the government for direct negotiations for the first time since the outbreak of the conflict. They decided to create a framework for an inter-Mali dialogue and issued a joint statement where they agreed to suspend hostilities and made a ‘commitment to (Mali’s) national unity, territorial integrity, and a republican form of secularism as a prerequisite for the opening of the dialogue (UCDP 2014). Negotiations lost their relevance when Ansar Dine and AQIM made a surprise attack in central Mali in January 2013 (Gaasholt 2013:87).

Ansar Dine split into two factions in 2012. In a statement from the breakaway faction, the Islamic Movement of Azawad (MIA), the group was said to reject all forms of extremism and terrorism and was ready to negotiate (BBC 2013a). At the end of 2013 there were reports that Algeria was trying to get Ansar Dine back to the negotiation table. Al-Jazeera reported that Algeria had offered the group to give up arms and agree to ceasefire in return for amnesty of its members. The group would have to end its collaboration with other Islamist groups, such as AQIM. The group responded favorably, according to the report, and signalized its openness to take part in peace talks with the government (UCDP 2014).

Conclusions: Internationalization and Conflict Resolution

This paper has examined the occurrence of mediation, but that is, admittedly, just one type of conflict resolution process, and the outcome of these mediation efforts are not the focus of this paper. There is clearly a need to know more about the conditions under which religiously defined conflicts are mitigated, managed and resolved. Still, little
empirical work has been done on the peacemaking processes in religiously defined conflicts. Indeed, Hasenclever and Rittberger correctly identified that there are not much ‘systematic research on adequate strategies for dealing peacefully with conflicts which include a religious dimension’ (Hasenclever and Rittberger 2000). Future research therefore needs to focus attention to the short- as well as long-term effects of international mediation in sacred wars, as well as examining other forms of conflict resolution and management of religious revolts. Yet, this study is at least starting to move in that direction. It has tried to address the question of why mediation occurs in religiously defined conflicts under some conditions but not others. The statistical analysis indicated some preliminary empirical results pointing to two main factors in accounting for readiness to engage in mediation: costs of conflicts (as indicated in the measure of conflict duration), and degree of internationalization (in the form of active troops on the ground). These, as well as the other independent variables utilized in the quantitative analysis are, admittedly, rough measures. These were therefore also complemented by a more fine-grained analysis of some of the contemporary peace processes in religiously defined conflicts. The cases are all religiously defined and all of them contained some conflict resolution processes. Hence, the case studies are not comparative, but rather aimed for identifying the causal processes, which is ideal for theory development purposes. Yet, there are also some interesting variations in these case studies that can be utilized and these variations show some support for how the internationalization factor affects the chance for conflict resolution.

Based on the analysis of the cases, six observations can be made. First, the religiously defined conflicts do not seem, overall, to be different in the way of their conflict dynamics, if compared to other types of conflicts. Parties in religiously defined conflicts are affected by the costs of conflicts and react to those costs in terms of an increased
openness to seek resolutions to the conflicts. In several of the cases of religiously defined conflicts, there were costs of conflicts that provided the basic rationale for seeking to engage in mediated interventions. Hamas in Palestine, MILF in the Philippines and AIS in Algeria were all incentivized by the mounting costs of the continuous conflict to explore alternative routes through third party assisted negotiations.

A second observation relates to how the religious issues were dealt with in the conflict resolution processes. If it were the religious issues that made religiously defined conflicts intractable, we might expect to see a lot of contention around religious issues in the resolution processes. Actually, this is not what is happening. In some cases, Ansar Dine in Mali, USC in Somalia and IRP in Tajikistan, the religious issues are indeed central to the debate and resolution attempts. Yet, the religious issues seem to be resolved: in the Mali case through a regional application of sharia, in Somalia, by adapting sharia as the basis for legislation (in an attempt to marginalize the al-Shabaab), and in Tajikistan by allowing religious parties to contest in the national elections. In the other cases, the religious issues played a very marginal role in the peacemaking process. The main challenge seems not to have been to agree on the religious dimension: it was not religious issues that stood in the way of making progress towards peace. Hence, rarely it seems to be the religious dimension per se, which is serving as an obstacle for effective conflict resolution.

Third, it is not uncommon that the uncompromising position is found on the secular-leaning government, rather than amongst the religious militants. The Egyptian government feared the attempts of Muslim Brotherhood to serve as a bridge between the militants and the government, and therefore rejected the initiatives and repressed the Brotherhood. The Algerian government did not attend the mediation attempt by
Sant’Egidio and rejected the negotiated so-called Rome platform, despite the fact that AIS made significant concessions along the religious-secular dimension. Likewise, in Afghanistan, it was the government that reacted to the imaging of the Taliban in Qatar, and thereby decided to end those particular negotiation efforts. Thus, it was the government-side that, in all of these cases, terminated the mediation initiatives. In Mali, the process broke down because of violent provocations by Ansar Dine, but in no other of the cases studied, was the obstructing side the religious rebels. Governments’ decisions, of course, can be strategic (anticipating reactions from the militants), yet, it is still noteworthy that to some extent the main intransigence was to be found on the side of the governments.

Fourth, the cases that we have examined are overrepresented by conflicts where the rebels in their orientation are domestically focused, rather than focused on the global (Jihadist) networks. Even though there were various sorts of connections to global jihadist networks, in the conflicts in Tajikistan, Thailand, Algeria, Egypt, Palestine and the Philippines, the main concerns and aspirations of the rebels seem to have been their respective domestic agenda. Thus, several of the religiously defined conflicts in which conflict resolution processes occurred, were conflicts where the rebels were not belonging to the international Jihadist networks. The Patani insurgents, engaged in an on-going peace efforts led by Malaysia, were locally oriented and their demands (although a lot of un-clarity remains over their explicit demands due to the secret nature of their organizational structures) seem to have been oriented against creating a separate state in the Southern Thailand, rather than connecting to any transnational network.

Fifth, in most of the religiously defined conflicts that have experienced conflict resolution processes, there have been divisions among the broader rebel movement. The
analysis of the individual cases reveals some interesting *intra-movement variations*. Conflict resolution processes occur amongst those factions that are more domestically oriented, rather than internationally linked. For example, in the Philippines, the MILF were ready to engage in peacemaking, whereas the groups Abu Sayyaf and BIFM, both more closely linked to international Jihadist networks, rejected any moves towards the resolution of the conflict. In Somalia, the Islamic Courts (as part of a broader coalition) went to the peace talks in Djibouti, whereas the al-Shabaab rejected those talks. Likewise, MIA and GIA in Algeria – connected to the international Jihadist networks – never accepted the Rome platform that AIS agreed to, and eventually also rejected the amnesty deals that ended the military conflict. Thus, the broader movements of religiously inspired rebel-groups have been divided in many of these conflicts, and there have been groups open for seeking negotiations and mediated talks, although these have been challenged by more radical and internationalized spoiler groups. Future research needs to better understand how intra-movement divisions can create opening for conflict resolution, it is important not to treat the opposition in religiously defined conflicts as a single block.

Lastly, there are, in some of these cases, *variations over time* that relates to the openness for conflict resolution. In some of these cases, it is when the conflicts are de-internationalized (or at least moving in that direction), that the parties show an increase willingness to engage in conflict resolution processes. In Afghanistan, anticipating decreased American-led international involvement, clearly related to the willingness of the Taleban for engaging in peace talks. In Tajikistan there is also a development over time: the religiously defined rebel-group (IPR) shifted in its emphasis from an Islamic agenda towards a more nationalistic agenda, and concurrently also increasingly disengaged from the regional, international Islamist and Jihadist networks.
Overall, the internationalization comes out as a strong factor, both from the statistical analysis as well as the studies of the cases. In some sense, religious militants can be seen as parasitizing on local grievances and domestic disputes, by drawing these into a global dynamic and grander ideological battle. This implies that religious conflicts that are internationalized will be harder to resolve, not only because the number of stake-holders have increased, but because the local dynamics have shifted into a regional or even global interaction. Many militant religious ideologies have transnational characters and therefore are potentially rife for international involvement by external actors. In other words, conflicts that started out with particular and context-specific demands and aspirations are transformed, through their organizational and ideological ties, to broader dynamics. In relation to Jihadist conflicts this process can be labeled *trans-jihadization*: a process where local disputes are transformed and utilized in a larger global campaign, with the explicit aim of creating religiously based state-formations that go beyond ethnic boundaries and existing state border. The overall conclusion of this study is that it is the trans-jihadization rather than other characteristics of religiously defined conflicts that obstructs peacemaking processes.

To conclude, what this exercise tells us, at least preliminary, is that the best explanations for the intractability of religious conflicts are not related to the religious issues themselves, as much as the degree of internationalization. The conflict duration and internationalization were the two factors in the statistical analysis that were associated with the occurrence of conflict resolution processes, and the empirical analysis of the contemporary cases reveals that these factors indeed seem to be relevant in accounting for the readiness to engage in peacemaking. In that sense, the religiously defined conflicts are not very different from other types of political violence: previous research has found strong support for duration and internationalization are explanations for conflict.
resolution. At the same time, there are also reasons to believe that religious ideologies have particular propensities to transnationalize and that religious networks can be globalized. Thus, those religiously defined conflicts that are not internationalized are more likely to be open for peacemaking processes.

References


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