

Civil war and the current international system

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Abstract

This article sketches an explanation for the global spread of civil war up to the early 1990s and the partial recession since then, arguing that some of the decline is likely due to policy responses by major powers working principally through the United Nations. Unfortunately, the spread of civil war and state collapse to the Middle East and North Africa region in the last 15 years has posed one set of problems that the current policy repertoire cannot address well – for several reasons conflicts in this region are resistant to “treatment” by international peacekeeping operations – and highlighted a second, deeper problem whose effects are gradually worsening and for which there does not appear to be any good solution within the constraints of the present U.N. system. This is that for many civil-war torn or “post conflict” countries, third parties do not know how to help locals build a self-governing, self-financing state within U.N. recognized borders or, in some cases, any borders.

This article provides an overview of the problem of civil war in the post-1945 international system. I first describe global patterns and trends over the whole period, and next sketch an explanation for the spread of civil war up to the early 1990s and the partial recession since then. The main argument follows: There is reasonable evidence that United Nations and major power policy responses since the end of the Cold War have contributed to the global decline in civil war since the early 1990s. However, the spread of civil war and state collapse to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in the last 15 years has posed one set of problems that the current policy repertoire cannot address well, and highlighted a second, deeper problem whose effects are gradually worsening and for which there does not appear to be any good solution within the constraints of the present U.N. system.

The first problem is that compared to conflicts in Asia, subSaharan Africa, and Latin America, civil war and state collapse in MENA more directly affect the major powers, and possibly international peace and security more broadly. Third-party peacekeeping operations and a panoply of associated aid programs have been deployed to “treat” civil war-torn countries elsewhere, with a measure of success. In most cases, however, it will be impossible to apply this treatment model in MENA due to higher costs and other obstacles related to nationalism, the transnational jihadi movement, and the intensity of conflict among the region’s biggest powers.

The second problem is that third-party efforts to build effective, self-sustaining states in countries where states have collapsed due to civil war, misrule, or invasion have mainly been failures. This is painfully evident regarding the U.S. experience in Afghanistan and Iraq. To some degree it appears to generalize to the experience of post-conflict peacekeeping operations and foreign aid efforts in a number of low-income countries outside of MENA. Third parties do not know how to bring about the construction of self-governing states that can support themselves financially within U.N.-approved boundaries.

A common misconception is that the contemporary prevalence of civil war is largely a post-Cold War phenomenon. Figure 1 shows that the number of civil wars in progress each year increased steadily throughout the Cold War, already reaching levels in the 1980s greater than at present. There was a rapid increase around the time of the end of the Soviet Union, a spike that contributed to the perception that widespread civil war was a new, post-Cold War international problem. But after reaching a highpoint of 48 ongoing wars in 1992, the prevalence of civil war has actually declined quite a bit, leveling out for the last 15 years in the high 20s to low 30s.

The U.N. states system expanded a great deal over this whole period, but we see basically the same trends if we consider the share of independent countries with civil wars (the dotted line and right axis in Figure 1, calculated omitting microstates that had populations less than half a

million in the year 2000). It is also clear from these data that “prevalence” is the right word. Major civil conflict has affected roughly one in six non-microstates each year since 2000 and almost one in five today; at the peak in 1992 it was nearly one in three.¹

Figure 2 breaks down the trends by region. These mirror the global pattern for the two most conflict-prone regions, Asia and subSaharan Africa, and also for Latin America. The most striking exception is the Middle East/North Africa region, which roughly mirrored the other high-conflict regions until around 2003 but has seen a large increase from three wars in 2002 to 12 ongoing in 2014.² All other regions had major declines in civil conflict after the early 1990s.

From the steady increase after 1945 shown in Figure 1 one might suppose that civil wars were breaking out more frequently over time. This is not so. Civil wars have begun over the whole period at a rate of about 2.2 new conflicts per year on average, with at best a very slight trend downwards.³ The reason for the impressive increase in prevalence up to the early 1990s is that the rate at which civil wars have *ended* has been consistently lower, averaging 1.77 per year. Suppose that each morning you pour a random amount of water into a tank and then remove a different random amount of water in the afternoon, with the average amount going in greater than the average amount coming out. The tank will gradually fill up. This same sort of dynamic is behind the gradual increase and the contemporary prevalence of civil war in the post-1945 international system.

1. These and subsequent civil war statistics are based on an updated version of the civil war list used in James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (February 2003): 75–90. The core criterion for magnitude is that the conflict kills at least 1000 people with an average of at least 100 per year. See *ibid.* and James D. Fearon, “Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer Than Others?,” *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 3 (2004): 275–301 for details on other criteria, such as for marking starts and ends of conflicts. Figure 1 omits anticolonial wars, which has little effect on the number of wars but does make wars as a share of independent states (if we assign anticolonial wars to the metropole) higher in the late 1940s and 1950s. Note that other civil war lists yield quite similar overall pictures; for example, Therése Petterson and Peter Wallensteen, “Armed Conflicts, 1946-2014,” *Journal of Peace Research* 52, no. 4 (2015): 536–550.

2. I have included Pakistan and Afghanistan in MENA here. Sudan and South Sudan are grouped in subSaharan Africa.

3. Since the number of states has greatly increased since 1945, the rate of civil war outbreak *per state* has trended significantly down.

A related implication is that the average duration of civil wars in progress has increased over time. The international system has been accumulating long-running conflicts. Figure 3 shows that average duration of civil wars in progress is currently greater than 20 years, reflecting some very long-running, intractable conflicts in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Philippines, India, Turkey, and Somalia, among others. Even median durations of wars in progress have climbed to remarkably high levels, for example 19 years in 2010 and 14 years in 2014 (the recent fall reflecting entry of a number of new conflicts in the wake of the Arab Spring, mainly).

Three final observations concern types of civil conflicts. The proportion of civil wars in which rebels aimed to capture the central government, as opposed to greater autonomy or secession for a region, has been fairly stable since the 1960s, varying without clear trend between 50 and 60%. The proportion in which the combatants were organized primarily along ethnic as opposed to ideological lines has increased somewhat over the whole period since World War II, from around 60% in the early years to around 70 or 75% since the end of the Cold War.⁴ A much more striking change has been the remarkable increase in the share of conflicts that involve avowedly jihadist rebel groups, from around 5% in 1990 to more than 40% in 2014; see Figure 4.

The spread and prevalence of civil war in the post-1945 U.N. system is related to the persistent gap between the rates at which they have broken out and ended. What explains why, in effect, civil wars have been easier to start than to end? This section sketches a two-part answer. First, decolonization produced an international system in which most states are former colonies with weak state structures and good conditions for guerrilla war or competing local militias. Second, these forms of armed conflict can be highly robust, so that civil wars are hard to end militarily. And they are hard to end politically because stable power-sharing agreements between armed groups

4. These estimates have to be rough because there are a good number of cases that are difficult to designate as clearly “ethnic” or not.

are extremely difficult to arrange within states.

On June 26, 1945, when the U.N. Charter was signed, there were 64 independent states, 50 of which joined that day. As a result of successive waves of decolonization and the break ups of Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the U.N. system has tripled to 193 member states at present. We have an international system composed of many relatively small, administratively, financially, and politically weak states. The median U.N. member has a population today of about 8.1 million, a bit smaller than New Jersey's and more than a million smaller than that of the Chicago metropolitan area. Considering the 167 non-microstates, the median country has a population of 10.7 million; (approximate) examples include Somalia, Bolivia, and Haiti. Half of U.N. member states are former colonies that gained independence since 1960, and more than two thirds gained independence after 1945.

The colonial powers built state apparatuses in their colonies primarily to facilitate cash crop and natural resource extraction via a capital city, a few roads, and a port where possible. Administration often barely extended to rural peripheries. With the backstop of imperial militaries removed by decolonization, the option to try to use force to capture political control either at the center of a new state or in a region became more attractive for ambitious or abused would-be rebel groups. Post-independence leaders have – most of the time successfully – used state revenues and offices to buy supporting coalitions, reducing the risk of coup attempts and rebellions. But positive shocks to the relative strength of potential rebels versus a central government sometimes occur. These create windows of opportunity to try to seize power or at least get an armed organization over a threshold of military viability against what are often chronically weak government forces.⁵

5. Chronic weakness of many developing country militaries can have political origins: Insecure leaders fear that better resourced, more competent militaries would pose a greater risk of coups. In effect, they trade off coup risk for insurgency risk. See Philip Roessler, *Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa: The Logic of the Coup-Civil War Trap* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017) and in this volume, William Reno, "Fictional States and Atomized Public Spheres." Fearon, "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer Than Others?" gives a more developed version of the argument about shocks and civil war onset.

For example, the collapse of the Gaddafi regime in Libya in 2011 led to a flow of arms and fighters to northern Mali, providing a positive shock to insurgent capabilities that, in combination with post-coup weakness of the government in Bamako, made for civil war onset. In Iraq, the U.S. invasion and destruction of Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime created a power vacuum and motivating principle for multiple armed groups to form and seek local or, looking to the longer run, national control. In Syria, the mass demonstrations sparked by the Arab Spring created a window of opportunity for the formation of armed rebel groups, spurred on by the aggressive repression of an Assad regime that saw no prospects for stable and safe power-sharing with a moderate opposition.

Once an armed rebel group gets over the threshold of military viability in a developing country with good conditions for insurgency, civil war can be extremely difficult to end. Civil wars end either by military victory or with a power-sharing agreement. The latter may take the form of greater regional autonomy provisions in the case of autonomy-seeking rebel groups, or sharing of political and military positions by explicit agreement or an electoral process in the case of wars fought over a central government.

In civil wars over a central government, stable power-sharing deals are hard to reach and implement in the absence of long-term, credible third party commitments to enforce them.⁶ Each side has good reason to fear that the other would try to grab full control any chance it got and then use the full power of state forces against an effectively disarmed and exposed losing side. For example, the heart of the problem in the Syrian war has been that Assad and his supporters realistically fear that diluting their control of the Syrian military in any power-sharing deal would create an unacceptable risk of genocide against them – even relatively moderate Sunni opposition figures cannot credibly commit that greater opposition power would not unintentionally head in

6. See Barbara F. Walter, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement," *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 335–64; James D. Fearon, "Commitment Problems and the Spread of Ethnic Conflict," in *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict*, ed. David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 107–26; Fearon, "Why Do Some Civil Wars Last So Much Longer Than Others?"

the direction of control by more extreme factions. And likewise, if Assad retains a lock on the army, he cannot credibly commit not to use it to punish and secure himself against future trouble from current opposition forces, if they were to agree to a deal that gave them no real hold in the state's military.

Power sharing deals as means to end autonomy-seeking civil wars are more feasible because powers can be divided between territorially distinct central and regional institutions. Even so, central government fears that regional rebels can't commit not to escalate autonomy demands from a stronger position after they get a stronger institutional base can make autonomy-seeking civil wars difficult to end via negotiated settlement as well.

These considerations help to explain a depressing regularity: A large majority of center-seeking civil wars since 1945 have ended by military victory rather than with significant negotiated power-sharing deals, and likewise for around half of the autonomy-seeking conflicts.⁷ Further, military victories, the alternative to powersharing deals, are usually hard to come by when the mode of fighting is either guerrilla war or conflict among urban and semi-urban militias in cases where central governments have largely collapsed. Some of the strongest and most competent militaries in the world have struggled without much success with guerrilla conflicts. It is not surprising that less well financed militaries with much worse command-and-control problems would struggle even more and cause even more killing of non-combatants, which can then in turn help insurgents with their recruitment efforts.

How have other states (and non-state actors) responded to the spread of civil war and concomitant weakening of formal state structures? There was hardly any collective response until

7. James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Civil War Termination" (Unpublished paper, Stanford University, 2007). Note that it is not unusual for a government that has essentially won militarily to grant minor or relatively cosmetic concessions in negotiations to formalize the end of conflict (for example, Guatemala 1992). For an example of an autonomy war ended by decisive military victory, see Sumit Ganguly, "Ending the Sri Lankan Civil War," in this volume.

the end of the Cold War “unfroze” the U.N. Security Council. In the 1990s the Security Council rapidly assumed the role of the main international institution for coordinating major power and international community responses to the newly discovered – or newly actionable – problem of civil war.

Figure 5 plots the number of UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs) in the field each year. It shows a rapid increase from an average of less than four per year before 1989 – the year of the Namibian PKO UNTAG, with which began an era of P5 cooperation on PKOs – to an apparent steady state of around 17 missions per year since 1993. Most of the PKOs before 1989 deployed to facilitate ceasefires or other agreements ending interstate wars, whereas since then almost all PKO mandates have addressed peacekeeping or “peacemaking” in civil war-torn countries.

Peacekeeping operations can be understood as a central part of an “international regime” that has developed since around 1990 to address the problem of civil war in the U.N. system.⁸ Their central logic is to try to make power-sharing arrangements – usually including post-conflict elections – more feasible by providing third-party monitoring and enforcement capability to address credible commitment problems like those outlined in the last section. Peacekeeping forces have deployed to oversee and monitor disarmament processes, help implement post-conflict elections, and often implicitly to provide security guarantees for new governments and former combatants. In some cases, peacekeeping operations began as or morphed into military operations against rebel groups, on behalf of a flimsy peace agreement or an extremely weak formal state (for example in Cambodia, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, and Mali).

The international regime for civil war goes well beyond PKOs, however. They are supported and supplemented by the work and money of a host of IGOs, regional organizations, NGOs, aid

8. Richard Gowan and Stephen John Stedman, “The International Treatment Regime for Civil War,” in the second volume. See also James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States,” *International Security* 28, no. 4 (Spring 2004): 5–43 and Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983) on the concept of international regimes.

agencies, donor conferences, election monitoring and human rights organizations – all with programming and intervention theories developed for civil-war torn and “post-conflict” countries. International norm entrepreneurs have also been active and somewhat successful in this area, as illustrated by the U.N. General Assembly’s vote to accept the Responsibility to Protect doctrine in 2005, and the development of a system of international criminal tribunals and courts focused on human rights abuses and crimes committed mainly in or around civil wars.

The PKO-based international regime for “treatment” of civil wars has been roundly criticized for (what are argued to be) a number of high profile and disastrous failures. Notably, in Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and eastern Congo there have been massacres, even genocide, under the noses of inadequately manned or mandated PKO troops. PKO personnel have moreover repeatedly engaged in sexual exploitation and abuse of locals and, in Haiti, caused deadly cholera epidemics.⁹

At the same time, there is a strong case that, overall, the “PKO plus” treatment has done a great amount of good for relatively small cost. Although they get much less media attention, quite a few missions are plausibly judged as largely or even highly successful. A number of studies have found that even though PKO missions on average go to relatively hard cases for maintaining post-conflict peace, PKO treatment is associated with significantly longer peace duration after conflict.¹⁰ While it is difficult to be sure, it is plausible that a non-trivial amount of the post-

9. Virginia Page Fortna and Lise Morjé Howard, “Pitfalls and Prospects in the Peacekeeping Literature,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008): 283–301, Bernd Beber et al., “Peacekeeping, Compliance with International Norms, and Transactional Sex in Monrovia, Liberia,” *International Organization* 71, no. 1 (January 2017): 1–30.

10. See for examples Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), Fortna and Howard, “Pitfalls and Prospects in the Peacekeeping Literature,” Virginia Page Fortna, *Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents’ Choices after Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), Michael Gilligan and Ernest Sergenti, “Do UN Interventions Cause Peace? Using Matching to Improve Causal Inference,” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 3 (2008), Lisa Hultman, Jacob Kathman, and Megan Shannon, “United Nations peacekeeping and civilian protection in civil war,” *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 4 (2013): 875–891, Andrea Ruggeri, Han Dorussen, and Theodora-Ismene Gizelis, “Winning the Peace Locally: UN Peacekeeping and Local Conflict,” *International Organization* 71, no. 1 (January 2017): 163–185. Missions often viewed as having been effective include UNTAG (Namibia), UNTAC (Cambodia), UNTAES (Eastern Slavonia, 1996-98), UNPREDEP (Macedonia, 1995-99), MINUGUA (Guatemala), UNAMSIL (Sierra Leone, 1999-2005), UNTAET (East Timor, 1999-2002/12), and UNMIL (Liberia, 2003-).

1992 decline in civil war seen in Figure 1 is due to the U.N. system's response through PKOs and related interventions.¹¹ A remarkable 41% of the civil wars that have ended since 1991 have had UN PKOs (21 out of 51). This does not mean that the PKO (and associated post-conflict aid regime) caused or secured a durable peace in each case. But the evidence from comparisons of similar "treated" and untreated cases suggests that PKOs probably lower conflict recurrence and may increase the feasibility of peace deals that would be less likely without this third-party monitoring and enforcement instruments of the broader regime.¹²

Obviously, though, all is not well. Far from it, and the problems are deeper and more varied than can be gauged simply by charting the number and magnitude of ongoing civil wars. In this section I briefly characterize two. One is an intractable problem that has become increasingly evident over time. The second is a relatively new cluster of problems associated with the spread of civil war and state collapse to the Middle East/North Africa region indicated in Figures 2 and 4.

First, while the PKO+ regime has had some success at fostering peace agreements and making them more durable, third-party efforts to build effective, self-sustaining states in countries where states collapsed due to civil war, misrule, or invasion have mainly been failures. This is most clearly illustrated by the U.S. attempts at third-party state building in Iraq and Afghanistan. In both, U.S. or U.S.-backed invasions destroyed the existing regimes and structures of government, such as they were. In Iraq, the U.S. attempted to put in place a democracy that would share power between predominantly Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish parties. Elections, coalition politics, and

11. Work developing this argument includes Joshua S. Goldstein, *Winning the War on War: The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (New York: Penguin, 2011) and Human Security Report Project, *Human Security Report 2009/2010: The Causes of Peace and the Shrinking Costs of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

12. For evidence on the latter point see Aila M. Matanock, *Electing Peace: From Civil Conflict to Political Participation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017) and Aila M. Matanock, "Bullets for Ballots: Electoral Participation Provisions in Peace Agreements and Conflict Recurrence." *International Security*, 41(4).," *International Security* Forthcoming (2017).

foreign influences gave control of the top offices to politicians from the majority Shiite sect, who feared that genuine power-sharing with Sunnis (for example, in the army both at the top and regarding incorporation of Sunnis who had fought against Al Qaeda in Iraq) would open the door to coups or other types of subversion. The Shiite-led government excluded Sunni politicians and rank and file to a degree that favored ISIS's successful conquest of Mosul and much of western Iraq by the end of 2014. In effect, the Shiite governments have preferred exclusion, peripheral Sunni insurgency, and reliance on Iranian-allied militias to the more risky course of power-sharing at the center.

Despite years of training by the U.S. and many billions of dollars invested, the formal Iraqi army performed terribly after the U.S. left, completely disintegrating in the face of the ISIS attack on Mosul in June 2014 and losing Ramadi, Falluja, Tikrit, Hit and other cities to relatively small numbers of ISIS fighters. In Afghanistan, the U.S. and NATO have worked to try to build capable army and police forces for even longer – 15 years – again with disappointing results. Continued U.S. military support appears necessary just to maintain a costly stalemate with the Taliban. Without this support it is likely that either the government in Kabul would fall or Afghanistan would return to the Taliban-versus-northern-armed-groups civil war of the mid-1990s. Politically, the U.S. has provided third-party backing for a power-sharing arrangement between competing factions (President Ashraf Ghani and “Chief Executive” Abdullah Abdullah), but the government has been largely dysfunctional.¹³ The formal, U.N. member Afghan state would be unable to survive financially without massive foreign backing – 70 to more than 90% of government revenue comes from foreign aid.¹⁴

13. See for example Mujib Mashalug, “Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Denounces President Ghani as Unfit for Office,” *The New York Times* August 11, 2016.

14. Rod Nordland and Jawad Sukhanyar, “U.S.-Backed Effort to Fight Afghan Corruption Is a Near-Total Failure, Audit Finds,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 27, 2016. Anthropologist Thomas Barfield comments that since the 19th century, “successful Afghan rulers [have] specialised in dealing with foreigners by getting them to fund their states and equip their militaries.” <http://fivebooks.com/interview/dr-thomas-barfield-on-afghanistan/>.

The present Afghan state is in effect a ward of “the international community.” To varying degrees this is true of what may be an increasing number of U.N. member states. One rough indicator is the increasing duration of peacekeeping operations. For UN PKOs addressing civil wars, the average duration increased from two years for operations in the field as of 1991 to 11 years for operations in field as of 2014. In other words, PKOs tend to “hang around,” unable to leave without unacceptable risk of return to, or worsening of, armed conflict. Another rough indicator is dependence on foreign aid, measured by comparing total aid receipts to total central government expenditure. Averaging over the years from 2004 to 2014, in at least one in five U.N. member states aid receipts were at least half the size of government expenditures (whether we consider all states or only non-microstates). Looking only at the countries in the World Bank’s “low income” category for 2014, median aid dependence was a remarkable 86%. This suggests that in at least half of these low-income countries, more than half of all (intended) spending on non-military public goods has come from tax payers in OECD countries.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, many of the most aid-dependent countries are either post-conflict or mired in conflict. For example, states at or near the top of the list include Liberia, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Central African Republic, Cambodia, DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Nicaragua, Mozambique, Chad, and Mali.

Higher-income U.N. members can continue to pay to maintain the semblance of statehood according to U.N. norms in low-income and civil war-torn countries. Hopefully in some cases these subsidies will eventually no longer be needed because state building will eventually occur. But in other cases it may be that the construction of capable and effective state institutions can only

15. To summarize the calculations, let a be total ODA aid; g government spending raised by country taxes and other non-aid sources; g_a government spending from aid in the form of direct budgetary support, and m military spending. From the World Bank’s data series for total DAC aid and government consumption in constant dollars (DT.ODA.ODAT.CD and NE.CON.GOV.T.CD), averaged for 2004-14, I estimate that for the median low-income country, $.86 = a/(m + g + g_a)$. So $g/a = 1/.86 - m/a - g_a/a$. Thus the ratio of non-military government spending to aid from donors, g/a is at best close to 1, since g_a/a is on average about .15. Further, in low-income countries the military share of GDP is typically .01 to .02, while aid as a share of GDP is about .11 (median). Thus, $g/a = 1/.86 - .15 - .015/.11 = .88$, implying that the share of aid in total non-military spending by government and aid sources would be approximately $a/(a + g) = .53$.

be carried out by locals – third parties simply don’t know how or can’t do it – in processes that will be bloody, slow, and won’t necessarily produce functioning states that operate exactly within current U.N.-recognized borders. Recall that this was the case historically for state building in most of today’s major powers.¹⁶

In sum, while there is a good argument that the PKO+ regime has been a moderately effective and relatively low cost means of addressing the spread of civil war in the U.N. system, the regime has no good answer to the long-run question of how third parties can reliably foster the building of capable, not-awful states in civil war and post-conflict settings.

The second major problem stems from spread of civil war and state collapse into the Middle East and North Africa in the last 15 years. These are regions where internal conflict has particularly large negative externalities for the major powers, but also where the PKO+ treatment regime is difficult and often impossible to apply.

Although the roots are of course deeper, the rise of civil war and state collapse in MENA began in earnest after 9/11 with the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq sparking civil (and anti-invader) wars in both (see Figure 2). In Yemen a war between the Houthis in the north and the government in Sanaa began in 2004, the same year that Pakistan saw one insurgency restart in Baluchistan and another begin in the form of the Pakistani Taliban. The conflicts have continued, escalating in Yemen with the addition of a war in the south involving the local Al Qaeda branch and southern separatists. Following uprisings in the Arab Spring, Libya and Syria collapsed into major wars while in Egypt a lower-level insurgency developed in the Sinai.

In contrast to civil wars in Africa and the mainly relatively small separatist conflicts in Asian countries, civil war and state collapse in MENA has much larger bad consequences for European states and, arguably, for “international peace and security” (the U.N. Security Council’s formal

16. For a historical and theoretical analysis of the problems of “alien rule” that draws similar conclusions, see Michael Hechter, *Alien Rule* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). In this and the companion volumes, see also Francis Fukuyama, “The Last English Civil War,” on the centuries-long path of state building in Britain.

charge). Exhibit A is the Syrian war and the rise of the Islamic State organization in eastern Syria and western Iraq. The massive refugee disaster raises risks of contagion of civil war and state collapse to other states in the region, and has played into the growing pressures on European democratic politics and norms. The war has also led to dangerous escalations of the Saudi/Iranian cold war and U.S./Russian conflict, along with Kurdish/Turkish and Sunni/Shiite conflicts in the region. Elsewhere, anarchy in Libya also poses international problems due to refugee flows, while the war in Afghanistan reflects in part and certainly engages the volatile and dangerous conflict between Pakistan and India. The program of some Islamic fundamentalists involved in these conflicts involve terrorist attacks outside the region, and there is no doubt but that they would use weapons of mass destruction for terror if they could get them.

Unfortunately the international community's PKO+ treatment regime has not and probably cannot be applied in this region. In the first place, UNPKOs require major power agreement, but, for example, the Syrian war has engaged the U.S. and Russia on opposite sides concerning Assad (to this point).¹⁷ And even if an operation might get support on the Security Council in principle, there is typically great reluctance to send missions in the absence of a formal peace agreement and invitation by warring parties – the model is “peacekeeping” much more than “peacemaking.” This has been barrier for UN and other third-party missions in all regions, but it may be more so in MENA given the number of significant regional powers engaged in intense competition there.

More importantly, even in cases where Security Council political agreement is feasible, the fact that any foreign peacekeeping troops will surely act as a recruiting card for jihadis poses a major obstacle. Their rallying cry is to expel foreign influence. And finding capable peacekeeping forces from the region itself is made highly problematic by the Saudi-Iranian struggle, which ramifies into a region-wide Sunni-Shiite conflict.

17. Barry Posen, “Civil Wars and the Structure of World Power,” in this volume, argues that coordinated PKO interventions will become less common due to what he sees as increasing “multipolarity.”

For civil wars that either ended since 1990 or are still ongoing, Table 1 shows the proportion that got UNPKOs (at some point) for each region. MENA has the largest number of wars with no PKO and the smallest number with a PKO. The sole PKO case is the abortive UN Supervision Mission in Syria which operated for just four months in 2012, an exception that proves the rule. Both before and since the rise of a violent, transnational Sunni jihadist movement that greatly raises the costs for third-party peacekeeping, MENA has not been fertile ground for internationally sanctioned third-party support to end civil wars.¹⁸

Before 1945, state building was frequently a slow and often highly violent process. One can argue that, by contrast, the post-1945 U.N. system has done remarkably well as an experiment in the wholesale proliferation of modern state form. The period has seen unprecedented, global advances in life expectancy and living standards, as well as widespread diffusion of electoral democracy and probably a significant improvement in human rights on average. Many countries, including many new states, have been little affected by large-scale violence.¹⁹

But we are now seeing major pressures and strains for which the PKO+ regime appears to be inadequate. This is mainly due to the rise of civil war, state collapse, transnational jihadism, and major and regional power proxy conflicts in MENA region. The deeper roots stem from the failure of the Arab (and some other) republics to find, after independence, a formula for successful governance – that is, non-abusive, non-kleptocratic government that fosters and allows adequate economic growth. Transnational jihadi movements are a religious nationalist reaction seeking better governance and a sense of dignity. Unfortunately they are also vicious and immoral in the

18. Nor has Asia, which in our data appears to be partly accounted for by the much larger share of autonomy-seeking conflicts in this region (autonomy-seeking wars are in general less likely to get PKOs in our data). See also Michael Gilligan and Stephen John Stedman, “Where Do the Peacekeepers Go?,” *International Studies Review* 5, no. 4 (2003) on the infrequency of PKOs in Asia.

19. Bruce Jones and Stephen John Stedman stress these points in “Civil Wars and the Post Cold War International Order,” in this volume.

extreme, and destined to fail as a governance model if they ever really get to try to implement their current vision.

The experience of the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan (and for that matter Vietnam) suggests that at least in these cases, the problem of building a state that can finance and govern itself can only be solved by locals, in what may be violent process. Third-party support for one faction or another, or for formal power-sharing between former enemies, may put on hold or even undermine effective state building. While these pessimistic conclusions surely do not apply everywhere – see the general point about successes of the U.N. system above – their relevance to a number of states in MENA is especially confounding for “the international community” and of course most of all for the region’s people.

The international response should focus on humanitarian relief where it is possible to deliver without making matters worse, and trying to help protect from spillover effects contiguous states that are basically functional. Containing and degrading the Islamic State (and the like) is fine, but if the U.S. or other western militaries do too much this may effectively help sustain the movement at the level of a terrorist threat by preventing it from failing or evolving on its own. It is hard to kill an ideology by bombing it. In the longer run, the problem is state building, something that can only be durably accomplished by the residents.

Table 1: Number and share of PKOs by region, 1990-2014

Region	No PKO	PKO
MENA	0.95	0.05
	20	1
Asia	0.88	0.12
	15	2
subSaharan Africa	0.47	0.53
	14	16
E. Eur/former USSR	0.40	0.60
	4	6
L. Amer./Carib.	0.40	0.60
	2	3

Note: Includes both ended and ongoing wars

Figure 1: Civil wars by year, 1945-2014

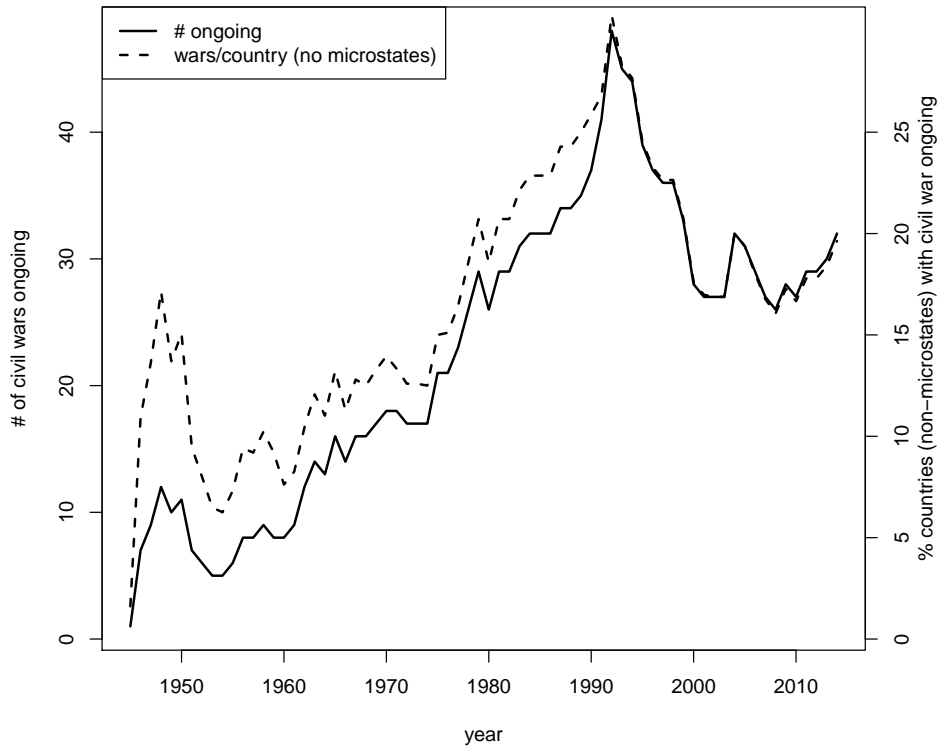


Figure 2: Civil wars by year and region

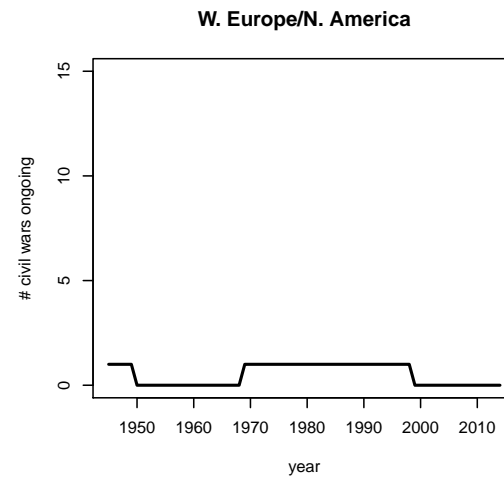
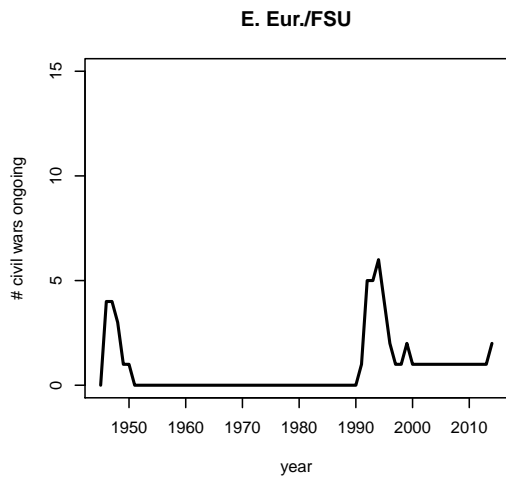
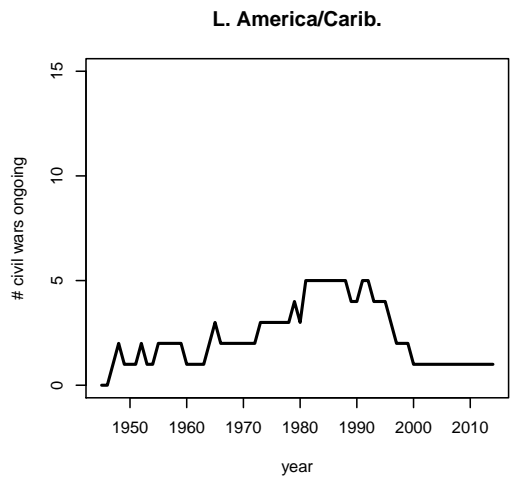
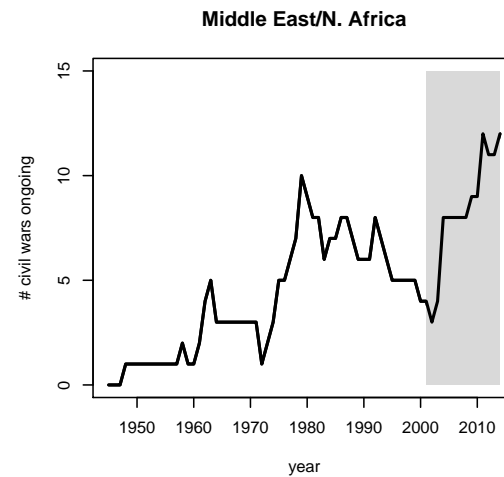
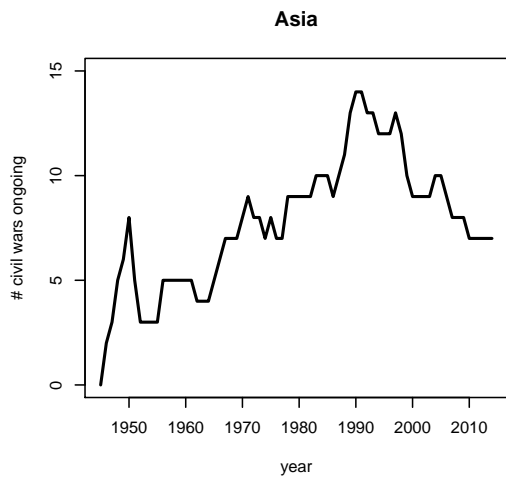
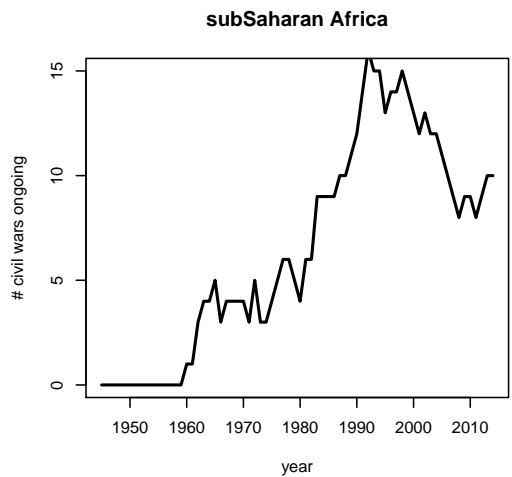


Figure 3: Accumulation of long-running conflicts

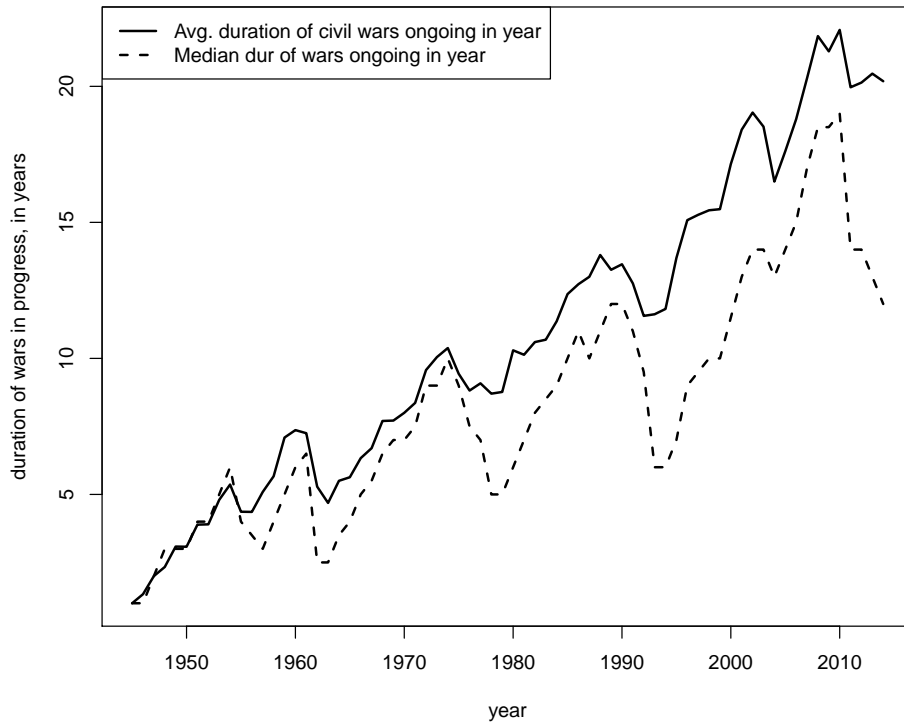


Figure 4: Growth in wars with a significant jihadi presence

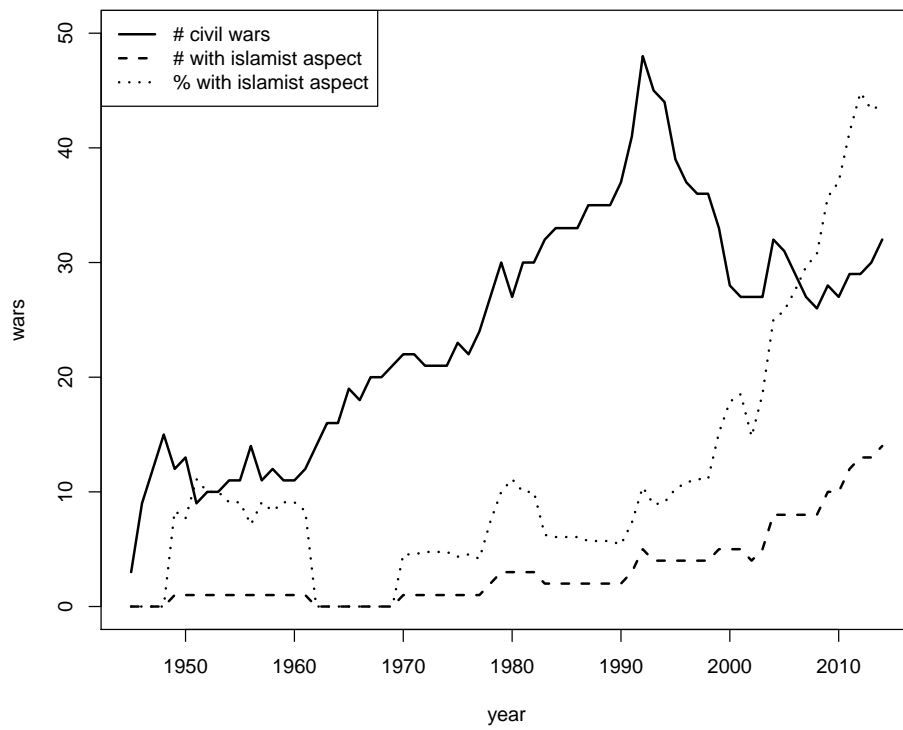


Figure 5: Civil wars and UN PKOs by year, 1945-2014

