

Peace through Security: The Durable Settlement of Civil Wars

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Presenter

Monica Toft is Associate Professor at the Kennedy School of Government, and Assistant Director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, at Harvard University. She has authored *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton University Press, 2003) and is the co-editor of *The Fog of Peace and War Planning: Military and Strategic Planning under Uncertainty* (Routledge Press, 2006). Her articles include “Getting Religion? The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War” (*International Security*, 2007) and “Issue Indivisibility and Time Horizons as Rationalist Explanations for War” (*Security Studies*, 2006).

Theme

Since 1990 there has been an increased interest in the study of civil wars, the duration of civil wars and the termination of civil wars. This presentation deals with a major gap in the literature on the termination of civil war. Up to ninety-five percent of articles written on civil war termination have focused on negotiated settlements; however only a small portion of civil wars end in settlements, and these settlements are often precarious.

Professor Toft points out that some civil wars end and remain ended while other reignite. Some are followed by solid democratization and economic growth, and others are followed by autocratic rule, mass abuse of citizenry and corruption. She asks the important question of how different types of war termination—settlement, stalemate/ceasefire or victory—can help explain variation in post-termination outcomes.

Based on a statistical analysis of all civil wars between 1940 and 2000, Professor Toft examines what type of war termination is *least* likely to be stable, and finds it to be rebel victory. Rebel victory also leads to long-term democratization (although not economic growth). Professor Toft’s theoretical basis for her finding is that rebel groups tend to have the capacity and legitimacy to perform well in the post-war period. Moreover, they win in contexts in which domestic constraints lead them to open the political space after gaining control of the central government.

Finally, Professor Toft argues that if the international community is to pursue settlements, then there needs to be an increased focus on security sector reform, i.e., re-building of the police and military.

Audience

The audience consisted of approximately 25 people. Audience members came from multiple academic units across campus including Department of Sociology, Political Science and the Jackson School. Faculty, graduate students and undergraduate students were all represented.

Questions

Questions by the discussant, Stephan Hamberg, a PhD student in political science, as well as from the audience, revolved around several themes. The first was a question of treating all rebel groups as one type. Trying to assess whether different types of rebel groups are more likely to have post-war success might improve the explanatory leverage of the study. This coincided with the theme regarding the region where the wars took place. In other words: Are there regional differences? A third theme was a question of the conceptualization of civil war. How many casualties are necessary for a conflict to be coded as a civil war? The audience questioned whether a lower casualty number would alter the results of the study. A fourth theme was the transnational nature of civil war. Consequences of different termination types might impact neighboring states and as such important policy implications of Professor Toft's study might be neglected. Finally, there was a discussion of the implications this study had for current Iraq policy.

Implications for National Security

There are two main implications for national security. First of all, the U.S. and the international community should carefully consider what strategy to follow when considering getting involved in civil wars. So far few analysts have openly argued for letting the parties fight it out. But according to Professor Toft's findings, this might provide the best long term result. Second, her analysis shows that ignoring security institutions is a poor choice.