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Religious Repression

Should U.S. support of religious freedom be stronger?

Nearly 75 percent of the world's inhabitants — 5.1 billion people — live in countries that restrict religious freedom, a fundamental human right under international law. Draconian antiblasphemy laws, threats of imprisonment, physical attacks and the desecration of holy sites are among the tools used to stifle religious expression. Many foreign policy experts see religious oppression as a serious threat to global stability. Advocates in the United States are pushing policymakers to make religious freedom a higher priority, arguing that promoting it abroad will help defuse tensions and foster peace and democracy. But others say that making religion a focus of foreign policy is a mistake because it is too complex and volatile an issue. Meanwhile, some countries, such as newly independent South Sudan, have taken noteworthy steps to broaden religious rights.

Refugees from Sudan attend church services in a refugee camp in newly independent South Sudan in July 2012. After the south voted for independence in 2011, following a 22-year civil war, thousands of Sudanese Christians in the largely Muslim north fled south, where the new constitution protects religious freedom. Sudan's imposition of draconian Islamic law, or Sharia, sparked the war.

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RELIGIOUS REPRESSION

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Religious Repression

BY MICHELLE JOHNSON

THE ISSUES

Maaloula was once an oasis of calm in Syria's civil war. The town of 17 churches and holy relics is one of the last places where people still speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus.

At the start of the war nearly three years ago, the town's religious leaders — Muslim and Christian — vowed to keep the peace, said Mahmoud Diab, Maaloula's Sunni imam. But in early September, al Qaeda-linked rebels attacked, shouting "We are from the al-Nusra Front and have come to make life miserable for the Crusaders," an Islamist term for Christians. The rebels killed at least 10 Christians, some for refusing to convert to Islam. [1]

AFP/Getty Images/Khaled Desouki

Mourners in Cairo, Egypt, carry the coffins of four Coptic Christians who were gunned down at a wedding on Oct. 20, 2013. Since the July ouster of President Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, Christians have been the primary target of religious violence fomented by the Brotherhood, which blames Christians for Morsi's ouster.

Nearly three-fourths of the world's people live in places with "high" or "very high" degrees of restrictions on religious freedom, according to the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, a think tank in Washington. Such repression can range from restrictions on worship to government complicity in mob violence against religious minorities. [2] Religious harassment also includes physical assaults, arrests, detentions, desecration of holy sites and discrimination against religious groups in employment, education and housing, according to Pew.

Religious persecution has destabilized the social and political order in many parts of the world and contributed to numerous geopolitical conflicts, say advocates of religious freedom. They want the U.S. Department of State to push foreign governments harder to loosen restrictions on religion, arguing that greater freedom is the best way to defuse conflict and in turn protect U.S. interests abroad. [3] But others worry that an overemphasis on religion could alienate allies or have other unintended consequences.

Religious intolerance is "as big as oil, as nuclear weapons. It's a huge threat, and underestimated, and not understood," says religion scholar Kelly Clark, a senior fellow at the Kaufman Interfaith Institute at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, Mich., and author of *Abraham's Children: Liberty and Tolerance in an Age of Religious Conflict*. "Religion moves people's passion. Sometimes you just need a tiny bit to push people over the edge into violence."

The United States has experienced its own, sometimes violent, incidents of religious intolerance, ranging from discrimination against Catholics to bans on Jews joining country clubs, enrolling in college or running for political office in some states. And anti-Muslim sentiment spiked after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

But partly because of its First Amendment guarantee of religious freedom and its tradition of religious and cultural plurality, experts say, the United States generally has avoided the kind of egregious religious persecution playing out in many parts of the world. (*See map, p. 936.*) For instance:

• In Egypt, Christians have been the primary target of religious violence, particularly since the July military ouster of President Mohamed Morsi, a key member of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, which blames Christians for his political failure.

• In Nigeria, the radical Islamist group Boko Haram has killed more than 3,500 people since July 2009, including some 40 university students massacred in September as they slept in their dormitory. [4] The group believes Western education is a sin.

• In India, Hindu nationalists are blamed for violence against religious minorities, including a Christmas 2007 attack in Orissa state that destroyed 55 Christian churches and 600 houses. [5]

• In Myanmar (formerly Burma), extremist Buddhist monks are leading what human rights groups call an "ethnic cleansing" campaign against Rohingya Muslims. The United Nations estimates that some 140,000 people have been displaced by violence, and tens of thousands of others have fled by boat. [6]

Repression Most Severe in Middle East, North Africa

Twenty countries imposed tight restrictions on religion in 2011, twice as many as five years earlier. The Middle East and North Africa had the most severe restrictions, despite widespread expectations the Arab Spring uprisings would lead to greater freedoms. The number of countries with low restrictions dropped from 117 to 100 during the five-year period. Researchers say religious persecution and conflict are more widespread where government restrictions on religion are greatest. Forty percent of nations imposed such limits in 2011, a five-year high. Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and Russia were the most restrictive. The U.S. designation as "moderately" restrictive stems from recent attempts by states and cities to ban Sharia law or block construction of mosques as well as a spike in religion-related terrorism, such as mass shootings at Ft. Hood, Texas, in 2009 and at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin in 2012.

Government Restrictions on Religion

Source: "Arab Spring Adds to Global Restrictions on Religion," Pew Research Center, June 2013, www.pewforum.org/files/2013/06/RestrictionsIV-web.pdf

• In Iran, members of the Baha'i faith face violence and systematic persecution in education and employment.

• In China, some 3,500 practitioners of Falun Gong, a Buddhist spiritual discipline the government considers an illegal cult, reportedly have been killed in a 14-year campaign to stamp out the group. The State Department estimates that half of the estimated 250,000 detainees in China's forced-labor camps may be Falun Gong adherents. [7]

Worldwide, about 100 million Christians are targeted by acts ranging from verbal harassment to torture and death because of their faith, according to Open Doors, an interdenominational Christian group based in Santa Ana, Calif., that ranks the most oppressive conditions for Christians.

Religious restrictions and violence have drastically increased in parts of the Middle East and North Africa since the Arab Spring uprisings that began in Tunisia in 2010, largely because of sectarian hostilities between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. [8]

Experts say religious conflicts often are part of ethnic- or cultural-cleansing efforts or campaigns to grab land or power. While some religious conflicts "are the result of genuine intolerance

of heresies and insults to religion," says Nina Shea, director of the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom in Washington, others reflect efforts "to consolidate national identity. The gain or consolidation of power seems to be the common goal or result, if not the driving force."

In some cases, laws intended to protect a certain religion — often the majority faith — lead to persecution of religious minorities. Most Islamic countries — 95 percent of those in the Middle East and North Africa, for example — have constitutions or laws that favor Islam but lack a constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. Many of those governments also outlaw apostasy — switching to another religion or renouncing one's faith. [9]

In countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran, acts considered blasphemous, defamatory or insulting to Islamic figures or symbols are punishable by death. Such laws have been used against religious minorities and dissidents.

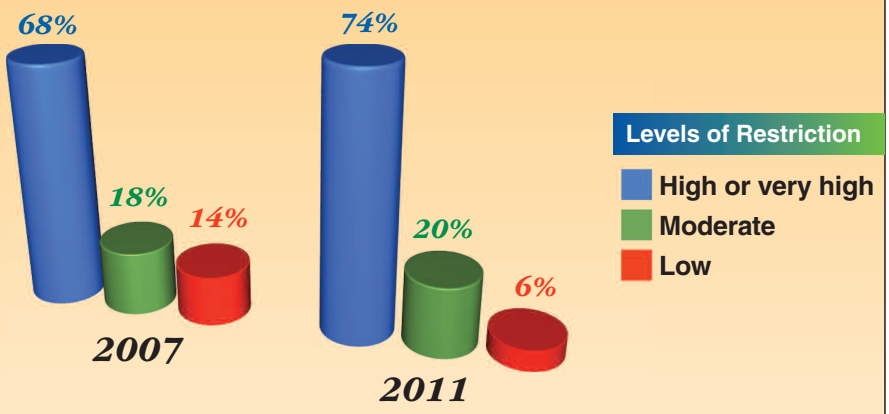
"We've seen, for instance, in the past year or so, especially since the beginning of the Arab awakening, the increase and application of blasphemy laws in a number of countries from Egypt to Pakistan and Tunisia, even Kuwait and Saudi Arabia," says Dwight Bashir, deputy director for policy and research at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), a federal panel that monitors religious freedom abroad. "In a lot of these cases someone simply had an alternative view, a dissenting view, and they were prosecuted."

Religious freedom has been considered a fundamental human right since 1948, when the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1976 extended and codified that right, but enforcement is limited to a periodic review of countries' human rights records. [10]

Most of World Lacks Religious Freedom

Nearly three-fourths of the world's inhabitants — some 5.1 billion people — live in countries that impose severe restrictions on religious freedom, a 6-percentage-point increase over 2007. During the same period, the number of countries with "low" restrictions declined by more than half.

Percentage of Global Population and Level of Religious Restrictions



Source: "Arab Spring Adds to Global Restrictions on Religion," Pew Research Center, June 2013, www.pewforum.org/files/2013/06/RestrictionsIV-web.pdf

In the United States, the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, which established the USCIRF, created the strongest tools for pressing other countries to address religious persecution and repression. The law requires the State Department, acting on behalf of the president, to impose penalties such as sanctions, embargos or foreign aid restrictions on countries the department finds to be consistently abusing religious rights. A waiver can be issued, however. (*See graphic, p. 948.*)

Many religious freedom advocates say the law has never been used to its full potential. "It would be difficult to name a single country in the world over the past 15 years where American religious foreign policy has helped to reduce religious persecution or increase religious freedom in any substantial or sustained way," said Thomas Farr, director of the Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs and a former director of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom. [11]

Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., author of the 1998 law, sponsored a bill this year to create a special State Department envoy focusing specifically on the plight of religious minorities in the Middle East and South Asia. It passed the House but is stalled in a Senate committee.

This summer, the European Union (EU) adopted first-ever guidelines for how EU officials can promote religious freedom abroad.

As religious groups raise concerns about their treatment and policymakers debate the role of religion in diplomacy, these are some of the issues being debated:

Is religious repression on the rise?

Pew researchers measuring restrictions on religion worldwide have found a pattern: Physical persecution and conflict are higher in places with greater government restrictions on religion. [12] In their latest report, the researchers

found that religious restrictions were rising in every region of the world, including the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa, where they had previously been declining. [13]

"We don't say that there's a direct causal effect, but where you see high social hostilities you also see high government restrictions," says Brian J. Grim, lead researcher of the Pew project. "We've been able to document with facts and figures a reality that many people on the ground have seen. Previously, most people dealing with religious freedom relied on anecdotes and expert opinion to summarize the situation. These reports have concrete measures and track them over time.

"Certain types of restrictions have a stronger association with hostilities and vice versa," Grim says. For example, social hostilities are most volatile in countries where governments strongly favor one religion. Among the 13 types of social hostilities he measured, sectarian violence was most closely associated with government restrictions, he says.

In the 20 countries of the Middle East and North Africa, 95 percent of governments highly favor one religion, compared to 12 percent in the rest of the world. [14] Countries with government-favored religions also experienced a much higher incidence of sectarian violence — 50 percent versus 11 percent in the rest of the world. Reports of crimes and malicious acts motivated by religious hatred and of violence or public tensions between religious groups were also higher. [15]

Grim says looking at places where religious repression or persecution is rising can serve as an "early warning system" for spotting threats of widespread human rights abuses or genocide.

Michael Wahid Hanna, a senior fellow at the liberal-leaning Century Foundation think tank, based in Washington and New York City, says religious repression and persecution may seem worse than in the past, in part because people have access to more information through social media and viral videos.

However, he says, "On the whole, there's probably a credible argument that we're in a better moment than we were 100 or even 75, 50 years ago" because of the U.N.'s development of human rights standards and how they changed international relations and norms.

In the United States, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) publishes an annual list of "countries of particular concern" (CPC) or those that commit or tolerate "systematic, ongoing and egregious" violations of religious freedom, including "torture, prolonged detention without charges, disappearances or other flagrant denials of the right to life, liberty or the security of persons." [16] Countries can be dropped from the list only if the State Department deems they are improving the climate for religious freedom. (*See graphic, p. 948.*)

But commission members don't always agree on what constitutes improvement. In its 2013 report, the commission acknowledged that Turkey had loosened its ban on Muslims wearing headscarves in government buildings and revised textbooks containing derogatory material about religious minorities. Turkey is "moving in a positive direction with regard to religious freedom," the report said. [17] But four commission members disagreed with the panel's decision to remove Turkey from the watch list, citing the government's restrictions on minority religious communities, including non-Sunni Muslims. [18]

Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, a Northwestern University political scientist who studies the role of religion in public life, says those who try to measure religious repression and persecution run the risk of oversimplifying the issue. "We need to stop trying to fix numbers to these things and making charts and graphs," she says. To truly understand religious persecution or repression, it's necessary to understand the specific social, cultural or economic conditions involved, she says.

Amjad Mahmood Khan, an attorney who serves as spokesperson for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA, a Silver Spring, Md., advocacy and networking group for Ahmadiyyahs, members of a reformed Muslim movement founded in the 19th century, says the number of religious persecution cases he's encountered has "dramatically increased. The work I do concerns many regions — Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East — and I think that is a disturbing trend and one that is unfortunately devolving and not improving," Khan says. He points in particular to antiblasphemy and anti-apostasy laws.

"We see that in Pakistan very dramatically, we see that in Indonesia. We see that in a variety of Middle East countries. We see that there are contradictions in the pronouncements to the international community about human rights standards and religious freedom and the legislation that is patently discriminatory against people of faith," Khan says.

He attributes much of the increase in religious persecution to weak international human rights laws guaranteeing religious freedom, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. [19] Its only enforcement mechanism is a periodic review of a country's human rights record by the U.N. Human Rights Committee.

Is rising fundamentalism to blame for religious repression and persecution?

Fundamentalism is a term coined in the early 20th century when brothers Milton and Lyman Stewart published a collection of essays by leading theologians, called "The Fundamentals." The essays described an emerging kind of American Protestantism that saw the core tenets of Christianity as being the belief that the Bible is the literal word of God and that Jesus Christ would

one day return to judge and rule the world. [20]

Today the term often is used to describe political or religious groups that advocate a literal interpretation of their founding documents or holy texts. Some — but not all — of those groups seek to replace secular law with religious law, and the most extreme advocate violence to achieve their aims. [21]

But whether — and to what extent — fundamentalism is to blame for religious repression and persecution is a matter of strong debate among experts. Some argue fundamentalism is the primary force behind global religious suppression. But others, noting that many religiously conservative groups shun aggression or violence, contend that political and social objectives are the driving force behind religious intolerance.

Abdullahi An-Na'im, an Emory University law professor and prominent scholar on Islam and human rights, says fundamentalism is "the phenomenon of claiming that we have the absolute, exclusive truth to the exclusion of other people," says. "And as such, it can be political and ideological, as well as religious. It is a mindset, an attitude of intolerance to difference, to disagreement."

The rise of religious extremism worldwide is related to a "siege of identity," says Chris Seiple, president of the Institute for Global Engagement, a Christian think tank in Arlington, Va. "If you don't have a job, and you're looking for an explanatory framework for why your life sucks, hey, guess what? A religion with all the answers that blames the other guy makes a whole lot of sense," says Seiple. "Once others are defined and stereotyped, they're dehumanized, and that means the potential for violence."

Modern technology has allowed extremist groups to recruit — and act — globally and helped far-flung groups connect, making them feel more mainstream and legitimate, said Maajid Nawaz, a former member of the global Islamist party Hizb ut-Tahrir who now works to counter extremism through his London-based think tank, Quilliam. [22]

The Hudson Institute's Shea blames both the rise of "political Islam" — groups that seek a greater role for Islamic law in social and political life — and violent religious extremist groups, such as al Qaeda and its offshoots, for an increase in religious persecution, particularly in countries such as Iraq, Syria and Egypt.

The rise of such groups "has resulted in the targeting of Muslim and non-Muslim minorities in countries throughout the world," Shea says. "And there's also a power struggle going on within Islam between Sunnis and Shiites, Islamists and secularists for state power, and that has resulted also in religious repression and persecution."

The sectarian conflict has roots in theological differences and struggles between Sunnis, who represent about 85 percent of Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa, and Shiites, who dominate only in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain and Azerbaijan. [23] The oil-rich, Sunni-led Gulf states and the Islamic fundamentalist Shiite government of Iran fund much of today's Sunni-Shiite power struggle.

Harsh laws aimed at religious minorities often contribute to a climate of repression. In Pakistan, for example, anyone can file a blasphemy charge, and, because the law doesn't penalize a false allegation, it is commonly used to intimidate religious minorities or to settle business disputes. Two prominent Pakistani officials were assassinated in 2011 because they opposed the law. [24] Recently, however, Pakistan's Council of Islamic Ideology — after affirming its support for the law — told the government the measure should be amended to impose the death sentence on anyone making a false accusation. [25]

Khan, of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA, says such laws "embolden" extremists, who use them as cover for violence against religious minorities. "The battle against extremists cannot be won unless governments reform or repeal the blasphemy laws that give ammunition to these extremists," he says.

Clark, of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute, says, however, it "would be a mistake" to blame religious persecution solely on the rise of religious fundamentalism. "There are a lot of factors involved, and religion is one of them," Clark says. For instance, he says many non-Westerners associate Christianity with Western imperialism, and others resent American drone policy, which has led to numerous deaths of suspected terrorists — as well as an undetermined number of innocent civilians — in the Middle East. [26] Recent church bombings in Pakistan, for example, were said to be in retaliation for U.S. drone strikes.

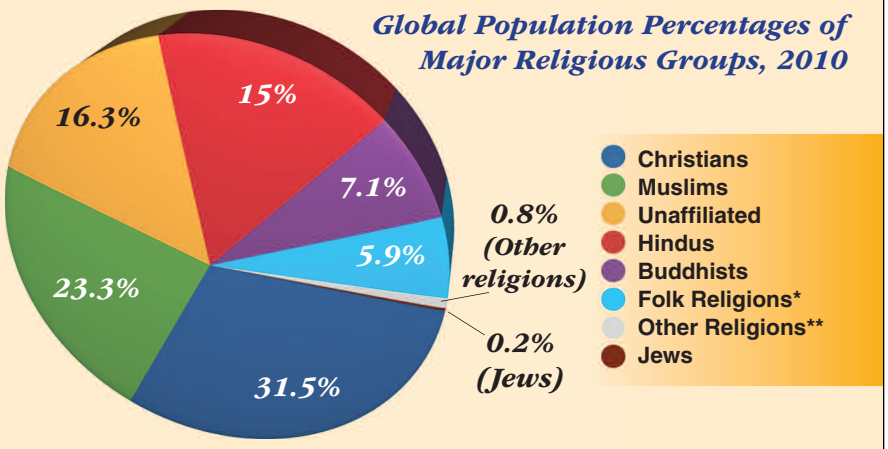
Hedieh Mirahmadi, president of the Washington.-based World Organization for Resource Development and Education, which works to counter violent extremism by encouraging the development of community groups and non-governmental organizations, says she doesn't see fundamentalism as causing religious persecution. "There are very conservative, traditional Muslim communities that aren't antipluralistic or violent at all," she says.

Like the Hudson Institute's Shea, Mirahmadi faults the rise of political Islam, which she describes as "long-term social engineering projects" designed to replace local culture and traditions with extremist interpretations of Islam.

While religious extremism can lead to persecution and violence, experts say, government policies can also be to blame. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has named China as a top violator of religious freedom every year since the commission began issuing reports in 1999. Although the Chinese constitution calls for freedom of religious belief, the government requires religious institutions to operate under the auspices of "patriotic religious associations" that govern each of the five officially recog-

Christians, Muslims Dominate World Religions

Christians comprise nearly a third of the world's population, and Muslims about one-fourth. Nearly three-fourths of the adherents to a religion live in a country where their religious group is in the majority. The most serious social hostilities involving religion tend to occur in countries where the government strongly favors one religion.



** Includes adherents of African, Chinese, Native American and Australian traditional folk religions.*

*** Includes Bahai's, Jains, Sikhs, Shintoists, Taoists, followers of Tenrikyo, Wiccans, and Zoroastrians.*

Source: "The Global Religious Landscape: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Major Religious Groups as of 2010," Pew Research Center, December 2012, www.pewforum.org/files/2012/12/globalReligion-full.pdf

nized religions — Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. However, the government's restrictions on the activities of Uighur Muslims from Xinjiang Province in western China and of Tibetan Buddhists are "systematic, ongoing and egregious," says Bashir, of USCIRF.

Nevertheless, religion is on the rise today in China, with an estimated 65 million Protestants, 12 million Catholics and about 20 million Muslims. [27] By 2050, China could have the world's largest populations of Christians and Muslims. [28]

Are Christians the main targets of religious repression and persecution?

Christians comprise the world's largest religious group, with about 2.2 billion adherents — nearly 32 percent of the global population. About 1.6 billion people identify as Muslims, 1 billion as Hindus, nearly 500 million as Buddhists and 14 million as Jews. [29] (*See graphic, above.*)

"The practitioners of other religions are not even close to the persecution that Christians face around the world," says religion scholar Clark.

The targeting of Christians is particularly acute in Muslim-majority countries, he says. It ranges from subtle discrimination, such as being denied access to government employment, to church bombings and killings, he says.

In its most recent report, Open Doors said about 100 million Christians are persecuted around the world, with the worst problems in North Korea, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan.

North Korea, which bans Christianity, has kept its No. 1 ranking for the past 11 years as most restrictive of religious freedom. Open Doors estimates that as many as 70,000 North Korean Christians have been sent to labor camps on account of their faith. [30]

Paul Estabrooks, senior communications specialist for Open Doors, says simmering resentment over the U.S. role in the Korean War, which ended 60 years ago, fuels antipathy toward Christians. "I don't believe it's because they have an antagonism to the actual beliefs of Christianity," Estabrooks says. "It's because they perceive that Christianity is an American religion, and therefore anyone who practices it is not loyal to their country."

Christians in Muslim-majority countries also bear the brunt of anti-American sentiment, including anger at U.S. drone strikes or support for the Jewish state of Israel. "It seems undeniable to me that we create a lot of animosity, and then we create a situation that's hostile for Christians around the world today," Clark says. "Christianity is associated with colonialism and imperialism and Western values and Western power. I think socio-politics is huge in why people commit violence. Religion gets the blame as the motivator, but these are often dispossessed and powerless people."

Fallout from the Arab Spring uprisings and the Iraq War have made the situation "suddenly and acutely bad" for Coptic Christians in countries such as Syria, Iraq and Egypt, says Abdallah Schleifer, a professor emeritus at The American University in Cairo and a veteran Middle East journalist. He says Christians are clearly the main target of persecution, at least in the Muslim world.

Discrimination against Christians hasn't always been a concern, Schleifer says. "Quite to the contrary — in the Arab nationalist days in these countries — Iraq, Syria, Egypt — Christians participated fully in political life."

Today, however, Coptic Christians find themselves in the crosshairs of sectarian

violence, the target of extremist groups who consider Christians "infidels," he says. Egypt's Christian community has become the scapegoat for the failure of President Morsi, who was overthrown in a military coup in July.

The Hudson Institute's Shea says Christians are the "most widely persecuted" faith group in the world. "It varies from country to country. But in country after country where there is a Christian minority, they are targeted; there is persecution, and by persecution I'm talking about the most serious forms of repression: killings, arrests, driving people into exile," she says.

Only about 1 percent of the world's Christians live in North Africa and the Middle East, where Christianity began, and Christian groups worry about the fate of those remaining in the region. [31] In a letter to 300 faith leaders earlier this year, Rep. Wolf reminded them that in 1948, roughly 150,000 Jews lived in Iraq but that today fewer than 10 remain. Egypt, once home to as many as 80,000 Jews, today has fewer than 100.

"It appears a similar fate awaits the ancient Christian community in these same lands," Wolf wrote. "Iraq's Christian population has fallen from as many as 1.4 million in 2003 to between 500,000 and 700,000 today." [32]

Almost every religious group faces harassment, says Grim, the Pew religion researcher. Christians face harassment in 145 countries, and Muslims in 129. But Jews, who make up just 0.2 percent of the world's population, have experienced harassment in 90 countries. "Some groups face harassment in a far larger number of countries than you would expect given their population size," he says.

In some cases, persecution is very specific. In Iran, persecution of the Baha'i sect dramatically accelerated after a revolution in 1979 overthrew the shah of Iran and instituted an Islamic government.

Advocates for the Baha'is say official state policy toward them is "nothing less than a blueprint for the strangulation of the Baha'i community." [33]

Baha'is are not allowed to build or maintain places of worship, schools or religious organizations. They are barred from enrolling in universities, holding government jobs or receiving government pensions. More than 650 Baha'is have been arrested since 2005, and as of February at least 110 are imprisoned because of their beliefs. [34]

"They're arrested simply for being Baha'is and suffer discrimination on a daily basis, to the extent that even Baha'i cemeteries are desecrated and bulldozed," says Bani Dugal, principal representative to the United Nations for the Baha'i International Community. "So really, the persecution extends from cradle to grave."

In Pakistan, Ahmadiyyah Muslims are disproportionally charged under that country's blasphemy laws. The country's constitution specifically declares that Ahmadiyyahs are not Muslims, legally stripping them of the right to self-identify as Muslims and leaving them open to persecution.

Buddhist extremism fuels the suffering of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar's Arakan state, where up to 1 million Rohingya are essentially stateless since being excluded from a 1982 citizenship law. Conflicts between Buddhists, by far the majority, and the Rohingya date back at least to World War II, when the Rohingya remained loyal to the British colonial government and the Arakanese — mostly Buddhist — sided with the Japanese. [35]

Over the years, the government of Myanmar (formerly Burma) has mounted repeated campaigns to drive the Rohingyas across the border into Bangladesh, which has an ethnically similar Muslim population. Last year, an intense wave of violence against the Rohingyas, reportedly organized by Buddhist monks and Arakanese political officials, killed scores of Rohingya residents and displaced more than 125,000. In the deadliest incident, at least 70 Rohingya were killed in a massacre in Yan Thei village, in Mrauk-U Township, according to Human Rights Watch. [36] ■

BACKGROUND

Holy Wars

Every major religion has been either the victim or the perpetrator of religious repression — and sometimes both.

Egyptian pharaohs enslaved Jews. In Judea, Roman authorities crucified Jesus. The Prophet Muhammad led battles against the tribes around Medina and Mecca (in what is now Saudi Arabia), as he and his followers established their new Islamic order.

During the Golden Age of Islam (A.D. 750-1258), most Muslim leaders, including Saladin, tolerated Christians and Jews living in the midst of Islam's vast empire, which once stretched from Asia to North Africa and Spain. As "dhimmis" — meaning "protected ones" — Christians and Jews paid a tax that entitled them to Muslim protection. [37]

The peaceful coexistence of faiths ended with the Crusades, a centuries-long series of "holy wars" that began in 1096, when Pope Urban II responded to a request from the Byzantine (Greek) Emperor Alexius for help fending off the Muslim Turks, who were expanding across Asia Minor.

The pope's speech to the Council of Clermont in November of 1095 called for taking up the cross and marching eastward "with the twin aims of freeing Christians from the yoke of Islamic rule and liberating the tomb of Christ, the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, from Muslim control." [38] The Christian warriors of the First Crusade succeeded in capturing Jerusalem in July 1099, waging blood-soaked battles on the Temple Mount and inside the al-Aqsa

Mosque. They left no Muslim survivors, historian John Esposito wrote, and women and children were massacred. [39] In 1187, Saladin led his armies in recapturing Jerusalem.

By the 13th century, the Crusades "degenerated . . . into intra-Christian wars, papal wars against [the papacy's] Christian enemies who were denounced as heretics and schismatics," Esposito wrote. [40]

Created in the 13th century to enforce orthodoxy, the Inquisition of the Catholic Church led to widespread persecution of Christians, Jews and other perceived "heretics" for nearly 600 years. [41]

In 1517, German theologian Martin Luther's challenge of Catholicism sparked the Protestant Reformation, a bloody, decades-long war of ideas and theology across northern Europe. The Reformation led to the splintering of the Roman Catholic Church and deep, lasting political and cultural changes.

More than 400 years later, the Holocaust became the single worst campaign of religious persecution documented in modern history. Beginning with the Nazi Party's rise to power in 1933, the German regime carried out genocide that claimed the lives of 6 million Jews, among others, in Germany and occupied countries in Europe before Allied forces liberated Nazi concentration camps in 1944 and 1945.

U.N. Actions

As a result of the atrocities of World War II, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Dec. 10, 1948. It includes freedom of "thought, conscience and religion."

From the outset, U.N. members generally agreed that the declaration should be expanded into "the hard legal form of an international treaty," Christian Tomuschat, a professor emeritus of public international law and European law at Humboldt University in Berlin, wrote in 1966. [42] The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) was adopted that year and went into force a decade later. The treaty declares that all people have a broad range of civil and political rights, including freedom of religion.

Originally, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights was responsible for reviewing countries' human rights records. But in 2006, in response to criticism that the commission had lost its credibility by allowing states with poor human rights records to be members, the U.N. overhauled the process. It replaced the commission with a Human Rights Council and implemented the Universal Periodic Review process, which requires countries to do a self-evaluation every four years and invites observations from nongovernmental organizations and other states. The council completed its first round of reviews in 2011.

Religious freedom is also recognized in the U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, ratified in 1981. It is much more comprehensive than either the human rights declaration or the ICCPR, but it does not have legally binding status, though many observers consider it important in shaping human rights law. [43]

Cold War

For much of the 20th century, the United States considered communism the primary threat to religious freedom.

Beginning with the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, when the government of Vladimir Lenin declared the state independent from the Russian Orthodox Church, communist governments sought to snuff out religious activity within their borders. Under Joseph Stalin's rule, from 1924-1953, tens of thousands of Russian clergy were killed or sent to labor camps. During World War II, 2 million Russian Jews died in the Holocaust. Following Stalin's death, the Soviet Union continued its campaign for universal atheism. [44]

Cold War-era American leaders borrowed on religious themes to mobilize the public against communism. "For many political commentators . . . , the Cold War was one of history's great religious wars, a global conflict between the god-fearing and the godless," wrote historian Dianne Kirby of the University of Ulster, in Northern Ireland. A National Security Council document that was pivotal in committing the United States to a massive arms buildup in 1950 called for the United States to defeat the "fanatic faith" of communism by mobilizing a "spiritual counter force" and harnessing the "latent spiritual energies of free men everywhere." [45]

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, religious activity has surged in Russia, but the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has found reason for concern. It said Russia violates the rights of nontraditional religious groups and Muslims and applies its anti-extremism law under the guise of national security "against religious groups and individuals not known to use or advocate violence." [46]

In addition, said the commission, several post-communist countries — Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan — are enacting "increasingly restrictive laws relating to religion and religious groups." [47]

In China, there have "always been two competing positions about religion," wrote Fenggang Yang, a sociologist who studies religion at Purdue University. During the Cultural Revolution, beginning in 1966, religion was treated as "a reactionary political force that the [Chinese Communist Party] must take political measures to [conquer] and control, and eradicate if possible." The other, which prevails today, Yang wrote, "treats religion as a false consciousness that

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Chronology

1939–1966

Nazis commit genocide against Jews, and the United Nations affirms right of religious freedom.

1939–1945
During World War II, the Nazi regime murders an estimated 6 million Jews in Germany and occupied countries, considered the most severe religious persecution in history.

1948
U.N. adopts Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which includes freedom of "thought, conscience or religion." . . . Israel declares independence; millions of Jews return to their spiritual homeland.

1949
Communists gain power in China and soon move to suppress religious groups.

1966
U.N. General Assembly adopts International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), a multi-lateral treaty that commits participating countries to respect civil and political rights, including freedom of religion. It goes into force in 1976. The United Nations Human Rights Committee monitors compliance with the treaty.

1979-1998

Violence rages in Muslim world.

1979
Islamists overthrow the shah of Iran and install the first Islamic theocracy in modern times. . . . Chinese President Deng Xiaoping relaxes restrictions on religious groups as part of effort to modernize China.

1981
U.N. ratifies Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. It reaffirms the ICCPR and spells out in greater detail the right to religious freedom or belief.

1992
Orthodox Christian Serbs launch ethnic cleansing campaign against Bosnian Muslims and Catholic Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina. . . . Hindu nationalists kill nearly 1,000 Muslims in India's Gujarat state.

1994
An Israeli reserve officer opens fire inside the Ihbrahim Mosque in Hebron, killing scores of Muslims during Ramadan and sparking intense fighting between Israelis and Palestinians.

1998
Congress passes International Religious Freedom Act, which creates the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and establishes sanctions the United States may impose against countries that violate religious freedom.

2001-Present

Religious extremism spreads as global tool for persecution.

2001
Al Qaeda terrorists kill nearly 3,000 people by flying hijacked planes into the World Trade Center's twin towers and the Pentagon; a fourth plane crashes in Pennsylvania. . . . United States launches military campaign to drive al Qaeda from Afghanistan, where leader Osama bin Laden is based as a guest of the Taliban — an Islamic fundamentalist group ruling Afghanistan.

2003
U.S. invades Iraq. Sectarian violence increases between Shiites and Sunnis.

2006
Palestinians in Gaza elect Hamas, a radical Islamist party, to lead the government. Christians in Gaza complain of religious persecution under Hamas, including the abduction and murder of a Christian bookstore owner, the closure of some Christian schools and the "Islamization" of Christian education.

2010
Pakistani court sentences Asia Bibi, a Christian woman, to death for blasphemy after she allegedly defiled the name of the Prophet Muhammad during an argument with coworkers, sparking international protest. She remains in jail.

2011
Arab Spring movement spreads from Sunni-dominated North Africa to majority Shiite Bahrain. . . . Sunnis lead protests against Syria's minority Alawite (a branch of Shiism) regime of Bashar al-Assad.

2012
Buddhist monks in Myanmar's Arakan state organize attacks against Rohingya Muslims.

2013
After supporters of deposed Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi are violently dispersed by security forces, they attack dozens of Coptic Christian churches and homes. . . . Suicide bombers in Peshawar, Pakistan, attack a Christian church, killing 81 and wounding 100. . . . In late October, Abyei residents vote in non-binding resolution on whether to join Sudan or South Sudan.

Building Peace by Protecting Holy Sites

"You can bring two sides together and make them stand up for each other."

War was hell on Bosnia-Herzegovina's holy sites. After Bosnian Muslims and Catholic Croats voted for independence from Yugoslavia in 1992, Bosnian Serbs, who are predominantly orthodox Christians, fought to make the breakaway region part of a greater Serbia. The conflict soon escalated into one of the 20th century's worst episodes of ethnic cleansing. By the time a peace accord ended the war in 1995, nearly 100,000 people — 65 percent of them Bosnian Muslims — were dead. [1] What's more, Serb forces had damaged or destroyed nearly 70 percent of the country's mosques, along with scores of Roman Catholic and other Christian churches. [2]

Such wartime desecration has long been a means of undermining an enemy's social cohesion and communal identity and "a way to get a lot of people upset very quickly," says Sharon Rosen, codirector of the Jerusalem office of Search for Common Ground, an international nongovernmental organization based in Washington, D.C., that focuses on conflict resolution.

The group is one of several nongovernmental organizations developing an international code of standards for identifying, monitoring and protecting holy sites. [3] The groups hope to convince the United Nations to adopt an international treaty establishing a uniform monitoring system to safeguard such sites.

Attacks on churches and other holy sites have grabbed headlines in Egypt and Syria in recent months. In 2006, the destruction of the Askariya Mosque in Samarra, Iraq, one of Shiite Islam's holiest shrines, touched off fierce sectarian fighting between Shiite and Sunni Muslims in Iraq. [4] This year, a bombing at a Sunni mosque in Kirkuk, Iraq, at the start of the Muslim holiday Eid al-Ahda killed 12 and wounded 24. [5]

Deep religious, ethnic and cultural divisions pose serious obstacles to building greater social cohesion in regions torn by war. In 2010, Search for Common Ground and other interfaith organizations began a pilot project in Bosnia-Herzegovina to track attacks on holy sites. Organizers say it holds promise as a peacebuilding model for other areas, such as Israel and Palestine, where religious differences can be exploited during conflict. [6]

About 40 percent of Bosnia-Herzegovina's 3.8 million residents are Muslim, 31 percent Orthodox Christian and 15 percent Catholic. Most of the rest belong to Judaism or other faiths. [7] In a place such as Bosnia, where people's ethnic identities are defined by their ancestors' religious choices, mosques, churches, monasteries and cemeteries can have powerful meaning for the community. [8]

Religious leaders in Bosnia-Herzegovina had long condemned attacks on their own holy sites, but by having these leaders speak out on behalf of others' faiths — and inviting the police, media and public to witness these public condemnations — the project's organizers hope they can thwart new attacks and cultivate interfaith tolerance.

In one joint condemnation, an imam and a priest came together to condemn an attack on a Catholic church. The Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina also noted a number of spontaneous condemnations organized without the council's help. [9]

"Very often in post-conflict situations, [religious] communities live completely segregated," says Anne Hushagen, a special adviser at Norway's Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights and project manager of the Bosnian pilot project in its first year. "In this project we have seen that you can bring together two sides, or even three sometimes, and make them stand up for each other. [These are] small, symbolic acts that can mean a lot to the individuals who are living in a vulnerable situation."

In the first year of the project, the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina reported that desecrations of religious sites dropped from 56 to 27. [10] Hushagen is reluctant to attribute the decrease directly to the project but says it has helped build trust and relationships among religious leaders.

Even so, she says, religious leaders can't be the only ones who do the work of protecting holy sites. Government institutions, including local law enforcement agencies and the courts,

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may be corrected through education and propaganda over time." [48]

In 1979, Chinese premier Deng Xiaoping lifted some restrictions on religion as part of his effort to modernize the country. While religion is thriving there now, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has consistently called it a "country of particular concern" (CPC) and recommended that the State Department consider raising religious freedom issues in diplomatic relations and consider sanctions if necessary.

Post-Communist Era

In the early 1990s, the former communist state of Yugoslavia began falling apart, as the country's major ethnic groups pushed for independence. Slovenia and Croatia declared independence in 1991, and Bosnian Croats and Muslims followed in February 1992. Bosnian Serbs, loyal to Serbian nationalist leader Slobodan Milosevic, strongly opposed the vote because they wanted the region to become part of a greater Serbia. When the European Union recognized Bosnia's independence in April 1992, Serbian forces began a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Muslims and Croats in an attempt to clear the land and carve out a Serb republic. [49] By the time the war ended in 1995, nearly 100,000 people had been killed. (*See sidebar, above.*)

must also be involved, as they are in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

At least 10 international religious organizations have endorsed the Universal Code on Holy Sites. Rosen is developing a pilot project similar to the one in Bosnia-Herzegovina in Jerusalem, which is rich in holy sites, including Judaism's holiest — the Temple Mount. Adjacent to it are the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, the spot from which Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven. The site has been a major flashpoint of conflict between Jews and Muslims. [11]

Stein Villumstad, general secretary of the Oslo-based European Council of Religious Leaders — Religions for Peace, an interfaith coalition focused on peace building, points to the need for a universal code to safeguard access and protect holy sites in times of conflict.

"In peacetime, places of worship and other holy sites are peaceful places," he says. But in times of conflict, he says, attacks on such sites are used to generate hostility.

Villumstad says the group of religious organizations has approached the United Nations and is working toward introducing a holy sites resolution at the U.N. General Assembly.

Finding member states willing "to invest their political capital is a challenge," he says. "It is a slow and meticulous process."

— Michelle Johnson

AFP/Getty Images/Dia Hamid

The 2006 destruction of the Askariya Mosque in Samarra, Iraq (above), one of Shiite Islam's holiest sites, sparked sectarian fighting between Shiite and Sunni Muslims in Iraq. This year the bombing of a Sunni mosque in Kirkuk killed 12 and injured 24.

[1] "Bosnia war dead figure announced," BBC News, June 21, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6228152.stm.

[2] Andras J. Riedlmayer, "From the Ashes: The Past and Future of Bosnia's Cultural Heritage," in Maya Shatzmiller, ed., *Islam and Bosnia: Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States* (2002), p. 98, www.alumniconnections.com/harvard/alumni/images/from_the_ashes.pdf.

[3] For background, see the Universal Code on Holy Sites, www.sfcg.org/programmes/jerusalem/Universal%20Code%20on%20Holy%20Sites.pdf.

[4] Ellen Nickmeyer and K.I. Ibrahim, "Bombing Shatters Mosque in Iraq," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 2006, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/22/AR2006022200454.html.

[5] "Iraq mosque bombing targets Sunni worshippers celebrating Eid," The Associated Press, Oct. 15, 2013, www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/15/baghdad-mosque-bombing-sunni-worshippers-eid.

[6] For background, see Peter Katel, "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *CQ Researcher*, June 21, 2013, pp. 545-572; and Jina Moore, "Peacebuilding," *CQ Global Researcher*, June 21, 2011, pp. 291-314.

[7] "Bosnia and Herzegovina Profile 2013," Index Mundi, www.indexmundi.com/bosnia_and_herzegovina/demographics_profile.html.

[8] Riedlmayer, *op. cit.*

[9] "Monitoring of Attacks on Religious Buildings and Other Holy Sites in BiH," Annual Report, Interreligious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Nov. 1, 2011, to Oct. 31, 2012, www.mrv.ba/images/stories/Monitoring/engl_monitoring%20izvjestaj%202012_final.pdf.

[10] IRC annual report, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[11] For background, see "Why it matters that Jews are standing on the Temple Mount," *The Christian Science Monitor*, Sept. 23, 2013, www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0923/Why-it-matters-that-Jews-are-standing-on-the-Temple-Mount.

In 1998, partly at the urging of American Christians concerned about the persecution of Christians abroad, Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act. [50] It established an ambassador-at-large position (held by Suzan Johnson Cook until her abrupt resignation in October) and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Each year, the commission issues a report identifying the countries that are the worst violators of religious freedom, and it makes recommendations to the State Department on how to deal with the offending countries. Using a combination of "carrots and sticks," the law allows for the State Department to use deterrents, such as trade sanctions or travel bans, and incentives, such as economic aid or cultural exchanges, to encourage a country to improve its climate for religion, says Bashir, the USCIRF's deputy director for policy and research.

"It's not just about naming and shaming," he says. "The ultimate goal is to see improvement and decrease abuses through diplomatic engagement."

Modern Extremism

The al Qaeda terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, shocked the world into paying attention to how religious extremism can serve as a tool for religious persecution, says Pew researcher Grim.

"With the attacks of 9/11, it became clear that religious actors — groups

Conflict Still Threatens South Sudan

"One thing they got right is freedom of religion."

American Evangelical Christians often cite South Sudan as a success story in the fight against religious repression. Sudan's 22-year civil war that ended in 2005, they say, was a battle between the Muslim government in the north and the predominantly Christian population in the south.

Other regional experts see the conflict — and continuing tensions between the north and south — as an example of how religious violence can be ethnic or cultural in nature or mask a struggle for power and resources.

In Sudan, it appears to be all of the above.

Sudan's civil war had deep roots in ethnic, cultural and religious differences, a colonial past that favored the Arab-dominated north over the black African-dominated Christian south and a struggle for control of oil resources, located mostly in the south.

"I thought the conflict in Sudan was not really religious so much as ethnic," says former Sen. John Danforth, America's first special envoy to Sudan, who helped broker a peace deal in 2005. [1] "That is, it was Arab Africa versus black Africa. I thought it was more of a revolt against the imposition of Arab culture on non-Arabs than it was specifically religious."

The war began in 1983 after former President Jaafar Nimeiri imposed Islamic law (Sharia) on the nation. The conflict left an estimated 2 million dead and 4 million displaced. [2] As part of a peace treaty, the southern Sudanese voted in January 2011 for secession and became the independent country of South Sudan that July. But many issues remain unresolved, including border disputes in the Nuba Mountains and the oil-rich Abyei region. International observers also worry about government instability in South Sudan: Earlier this year President Salva Kiir Mayardit dismissed his entire cabinet, and he said recently that the 2015 presidential election might be delayed.

Sudan's cultural and religious divisions in part are a product of its colonial past. Christianity came to Sudan in the sixth century, when a missionary arrived in Nubia, a region stretching across southern Egypt and northern Sudan. [3] In the 19th century, Britain and Egypt fought for control of the area. After 1899, they ruled the area jointly, then granted Sudan independence in 1956. During the colonial period, the British and Egyptians focused their resources on the Arab and Muslim north; the south remained underdeveloped.

"The little that was achieved in developing the economy, providing education, health and other services, was largely the work of Christian missionaries and a small number of colonial officials," wrote former U.S. Ambassador Don Petterson. [4] Thus, the church became a dominant institution in southern Sudan.

In the 1980s, American Christians lobbied Congress to intervene in the Sudanese civil war, and in time key evangelicals in Congress supported them. Together with the Congressional Black Caucus and liberal human rights groups, they formed a powerful coalition. [5] Meanwhile, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a government agency that tracks religious freedom abroad, pushed for appointment of a special envoy to Sudan, investigation of alleged war crimes and the use of diplomacy and economic sanctions to pressure Sudan into peace negotiations. [6]

Danforth, who met frequently with both sides in the civil war, also had a powerful ally in President George W. Bush, a born-again Christian who made peace in Sudan a foreign policy priority. "Bush did see it as a religious conflict, and so did some members of Congress," Danforth says. "He was very engaged personally. That's what really made it work. Every time I went over there, I would either meet with him or talk to him by telephone. That carried a lot of weight."

After the independence vote, many Sudanese Christians in the north fled to the south, where the new constitution spells out the freedom to worship and to teach religion. [7] An estimated 6 million Christians now live in South Sudan, compared to about 600,000 in Sudan. [8]

— can have a dramatic effect on religious freedom within a country, that social forces can have as much, or perhaps even more, power in restricting people's religious freedom," he says. But the seeds of violent Muslim extremism were sown in the late 1960s, with the rise of the Islamic nationalist and revolutionary movement. After Israel's humiliating defeat of the Arabs in the Six-Day War of 1967, Palestinian radicals turned to urban terrorism, launching a series of violent attacks that culminated in the kidnapping and deaths of 11 Israelis, including five athletes, during the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich. [51]

The 1979 Iranian Revolution, in which Shiite fundamentalists overthrew the U.S.-backed shah and instituted an Islamic theocracy, also raised fears about religious extremism. Iran today is predominantly Shiite, and its constitution provides limited protection for those of other faiths, specifically Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Judaism. [52]

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 — and the American arming of the anti-Soviet mujahedeen (Muslim guerrilla warriors) to repel them — also marked a turning point in the development of religious extremism. [53] It "stimulated the rise and expansion of terrorist groups," wrote John Moore, a former Defense Department analyst and now a security consultant. [54] After Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, the Taliban — a predominantly Pashtun, ultraconservative branch of Sunni Islam — emerged in Pakistan in the early 1990s. After gaining a foothold in Afghanistan in 1994, the Taliban im-

"There's total freedom of worship" in South Sudan, says Ken Isaacs, vice president of programs and government relations for Samaritan's Purse, a North Carolina-based Christian humanitarian organization led by Franklin Graham, the son of evangelist Billy Graham. "Christians are free to worship. Muslims are free to worship. There are all kinds of denominations here," including the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches.

Isaacs sharply criticizes the human-rights record of Sudan's president, Omar al-Bashir, who led a military coup in 1989 against Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi. The International Criminal Court in The Hague issued an arrest warrant for Bashir in 2009, accusing him of war crimes and genocide in western Sudan's Darfur region. [9]

Skirmishes with government troops continue today, particularly in the disputed Nuba border area, where those who fought for the south found themselves on the wrong side of the border when the war ended. The United Nations estimates that 200,000 refugees from the Nuba region have fled to neighboring countries, including South Sudan and Ethiopia. [10]

Disputes over control of the oil-rich Abyei region on the border between Sudan and South Sudan also threaten the peace. Fighting in Abyei displaced more than 100,000 people in 2011, and observers worry the conflict could tip the two countries into full-scale war again. [11] In late October, thousands of Abyei residents voted in a non-binding resolution on whether to join Sudan or South Sudan. [12]

South Sudan is scheduled to hold national general elections in 2015, but international observers worry about the fledgling government's stability. The president said in September that the elections might not be held on schedule due to lack of a finalized constitution or funds to conduct a census. [13]

Isaacs acknowledges the problems, but says, "One thing they got right is freedom of religion. And I think that's a good place to start."

— Michelle Johnson

[1] "President Appoints Danforth as Special Envoy to the Sudan," Office of the Press Secretary, White House, Sept. 6, 2001, http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010906-3.html.

[2] "International Religious Freedom Report for 2003," United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Dec. 18, 2003, p. 22, www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2003/c10265.htm. For background on Sharia law, see Sarah Glazer, "Sharia Controversy," *CQ Global Researcher*, Jan. 3, 2012, pp. 1-28.

[3] Eric Patterson, "Sudan: Race and Religion in Civil War," Religion and Conflict Case Study series of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Georgetown University, August 2013, p. 5, http://repository.berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/130801BCSudanRaceReligionCivilWar.pdf.

[4] Don Petterson, *Inside Sudan: Political Islam, Conflict, and Catastrophe* (2009), p. 10.

[5] Armin Rosen, "Birth of a Nation," *The Weekly Standard*, May 21, 2012, www.weeklystandard.com/articles/birth-nation_644421.html?page=1. During this period, American Christian churches relocated in the United States about 3,000 orphans from among the tens of thousands of children whose families were killed in the war. For background, see "The Lost Boys of Sudan, 12 Years Later," "60 Minutes," CBS News, March 31, 2013, www.cbsnews.com/8301-18560_162-57576821/.

[6] "International Religious Freedom Report for 2003," *op. cit.*, pp. 21 and 22.

[7] For background, see Article 23 of the "Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan," 2011, www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?page=type&type=LEGISLATION&publisher=&coi=&docid=4e269a3e2&skip=0.

[8] "Global Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center, Religion & Public Life Project, Dec. 18, 2012, http://features.pewforum.org/grl/population-number.php.

[9] For background, see Karen Foerstel, "Crisis in Darfur," *CQ Global Researcher*, Sept. 1, 2008, pp. 243-270.

[10] Tristan McConnell, "Africa's Hidden War," *Global Post*, June 24, 2013, www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/regions/africa/sudan/130620/sudan-war-nuba-mountains-khartoum-united-nations-yida-refugees.

[11] Maram Mazen, "Sudan's Abyei Clashes Displace 113,000 People, UN Reports," Bloomberg News, June 17, 2011, www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-06-17/sudan-fighting-causes-almost-113-000-to-flee-abyei-border-region-un-says.html.

[12] "Returning to Abyei region to vote for secession," BBC News Africa, Oct. 21, 2013, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24611597. Also see James Butty, "Abyei Residents Consider Unilateral Referendum, Says South Sudan Diplomat," Voice of America News, Oct. 22, 2013, www.voanews.com/content/sudan-president-visits-south-sudan-tuesday-october-22/1774274.html.

[13] "South Sudan's Kiir admits 2015 elections may be delayed," *Sudan Tribune*, Sept. 23, 2013, www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article48150.

posed an austere form of Islamic law — Sharia — publicly executing those convicted of murder or adultery and amputating the hands of thieves. [55] The group also forced men to grow beards and women to wear all-concealing burkas; it also banned television, music and cinema as well as education for girls over age 9.

In 2001, the Taliban drew worldwide condemnation for the destruction of two giant Buddha statues at Bamiyan, considered among the world's great treasures of religious art. [56] The group continues to be a significant force in Afghanistan today, where religious freedom is largely nonexistent. [57]

Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, who launched the 9/11 attacks, went to Afghanistan in the 1980s to help the mujahedeen fight the Soviets. He established al Qaeda in 1988, with a goal "to drive out the infidels, to establish Palestine and destroy Israel, to eject the 'heretics' who ruled in Saudi Arabia, to purify Islam itself with . . . fundamentalism," according to bin Laden's obituary in *The Economist* on May 5, 2011. [58]

Bin Laden's justification for waging holy war — or jihad — is rooted in a modern interpretation of Salifyya, a medieval school of Islamic thought. [59] Salafists believe Islam has been corrupted and should be returned to the way it was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and his followers in the seventh century.

"Salafists are truly fundamentalists. They claim they hold the sacred, ultimate truth as God had meant it. And that's why it is so difficult for them to create political alliances or come to

U.S. Cites Worst Violators of Religious Freedom

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which advises the Department of State, listed 15 "countries of particular concern" (CPC) this year, indicating they had used torture, prolonged detention or other severe methods to suppress religious freedom. If the State Department accepts the panel's recommendations and officially designates a country as a CPC, the United States is required by law to take action, such as imposing sanctions, embargos or foreign aid restrictions. The State Department this year granted waivers to two of the worst violators, Saudi Arabia, a key U.S. ally, and Uzbekistan, which serves as a supply route for U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Countries of Particular Concern

Burma*	Egypt
China*	Iraq
Eritrea*	Nigeria
Iran*	Pakistan
North Korea*	Tajikistan
Saudi Arabia	Turkmenistan
Sudan*	Vietnam
Uzbekistan	

Countries Where Restrictions on Religious Freedom Are on the Rise

Afghanistan	Indonesia
Azerbaijan	Kazakhstan
Cuba	Laos
India	Russia

** Designated as a country of particular concern by the State Department.*

Source: "Annual Report 2013," U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2013, pp. 4-6, www.uscirf.gov/images/2013%20USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%20(2).pdf

the mainstream of politics," says Emory University's An-Na'im.

Although Salafism is not inherently violent, a militant strain developed in the 20th century — reflecting anger over U.S. influence in the Arab world. [60] "The rise of more rigid Salafist interpretations of Islam have clearly meant rising sectarian discord within the Muslim community," says Hanna, of the Century Foundation.

Violent religious extremism has emerged as a phenomenon in every major religious group.

In India, Hindu fundamentalism began to develop in the early 20th century, when Indian politician Vinayak Damodar Savarkar wrote *Hindutva*, the basis of Hindu fundamentalist philosophy. The Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, represents the movement's political wing. Its current prime minister candidate, Narendra Modi, has been accused of supporting Hindu nationals who launched anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat state in 2002 that killed nearly 1,000 people. [61]

In Myanmar, the extremist anti-Muslim rhetoric of Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu has been blamed for stoking the violence against the Rohingyas and other Muslims. Wirathu has likened Burma's Muslims to African carp: They "breed rapidly, behave violently and eat their own kind." [62]

"Whether we live together peacefully or not is not up to the Burmese people. It depends on the Muslims," he said. "They are devouring the Burmese people, destroying Buddhism and Buddhist order, forcefully taking actions to establish Myanmar as an Islamic country and forcefully implementing them." [63]

Wakar Uddin, director general of the Arakan Rohingya Union, a Rohingya advocacy organization based in University Park, Pa., dismisses such talk as religious intolerance, pointing out that Muslims comprise only 4 or 5 percent of the population in Myanmar. "How are Muslims going to devour Buddhists? Do they have the power? Do they have armed forces?" Uddin says. Noting that the Burmese people are not traditionally hostile to Islam and Muslims, he says, "That is his rhetoric that he thinks can be used to mobilize the Burmese population. He's not protecting his religion. He's going on the offensive."

Meanwhile, the role and interpretation of Islamic law is at the center of the struggle between Islamic fundamentalists, including rebels fighting for supremacy in Syria, and moderates in Muslim-majority countries pushing for democratic reforms such as freedom of religion. Sharia has been widely debated in places such as Libya, Tunisia and Egypt as they rework their constitutions after pro-democracy movements toppled authoritarian regimes in 2010. [64]

Sharia, or "path" in Arabic, is derived primarily from the Quran and the Sunna — the sayings, practices and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. [65] A 2013 Pew Research Center poll found that overwhelming majorities of Muslims worldwide want Sharia primarily to govern family law for Muslims only in their countries and that there should be religious freedom for people of other faiths. [66]

Emory University's An-Na'im says Sharia as the law of the land is a "post-colonial invention," one without precedent in Islamic history. [67] "Sharia is for the community to live by, outside the state institutions," An-Na'im says. "As soon as it gets into state institutions, it corrupts the institutions of the state and is corrupted by the institutions of the state."

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Should Western countries make religious freedom a foreign policy priority?

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WRITTEN FOR *CQ RESEARCHER*, OCTOBER 2013

In the 1970s, the Jackson-Vanik amendment advanced the Free Soviet Jewry movement by linking freedoms in the Communist world with trade privileges. In 1998, the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) institutionalized religious freedom advocacy within the State Department. Since then, the United States has pressed, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, for religious freedom along with other foreign policy priorities.

It should continue. And it should do so with renewed vigor, since today we are seeing intense waves of religious persecution abroad.

Religious freedom is at the heart of our national identity. The Constitution enshrines its protection in the first clause of the First Amendment. When religious freedom is denied, state-enforced orthodoxies preclude the rights to freedom of speech and association, too. Simply put: When U.S. diplomats press China to honor copyrights, but are silent about those imprisoned for praying, core American values are betrayed.

The worst persecuting governments correlate with places that pose national security threats. In addition, as recent attacks on a Kenyan shopping mall, a Pakistani church, and scores of Egyptian Coptic churches and Mali Sufi shrines graphically show, religious intolerance by Islamist extremists signals a deepening and dangerous polarization in parts of the Middle East, Africa and South Asia.

Pressure can be economic sanctions, but need not be. Other levers include a formal diplomatic statement, a denial of a visa, banning exports of military equipment, or, conversely, bestowing economic and diplomatic incentives. A combination of "carrots and sticks" enabled the United States to help end Sudan's north-south conflict in which religion played a major role. Even Tehran has been known to stay a death sentence for apostasy or release a religious prisoner when American politicians take to the bully pulpit.

But our policymakers often miss the perilous circumstances of the world's religious minorities. For example, in 2010, Afghanistan's government razed that country's last remaining church. No American official acted to stop this, so on our watch Afghanistan joined ranks with hardline Saudi Arabia as a country that will not tolerate any churches.

German Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who courageously dissented against Nazi anti-Semitism, admonished: "Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act." Because the United States is a major power, for it to not have a religious freedom policy is a policy — a policy of indifference, even approval, of persecution.

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Governments should not include promotion of religious freedom among their foreign policy objectives for at least three reasons.

First, a focus on religious freedom requires that governments approach and define other peoples and countries in religious terms. Viewing the world through the prism of religious identity and difference distorts what is often a much broader and more complex set of circumstances on the ground. We lose sight of the bigger picture. We fail to see the ways in which social, political, economic and even neighborhood ties bind people together, cutting across and confounding sectarian divisions. This is occurring now in Syria.

Second, attempts to secure religious freedom in law are by definition exclusionary. Individuals and groups whose activities do not fit conventional, usually Western understandings of what "religion" is supposed to look like are not protected. To guarantee religious freedom, governments have to decide what counts as religion, as opposed to tradition, culture or superstition. Religion requires protection, but superstition does not. The 2010 State Department's "Religious Freedom Report on the Central African Republic," for instance, states that as many as 60 percent of the imprisoned women in the country are charged with "witchcraft," which the government considers a criminal offense, yet it concludes that the government "generally respected religious freedom in practice," and gives the country a good ranking.

The "religious freedom" model has no room for this kind of discrimination. Women imprisoned for witchcraft cannot suffer from violations of religious freedom because, in Western eyes, they have no religion.

Third, state power and interests matter at the intersection of religion and state. Foreign policy is no exception. Religious groups that favor U.S. political, economic and strategic interests are engaged and promoted. Groups that the government disfavors are classified as "cults." In this situation it is far too easy for the religion of the majority, the religion of those in power, or the particular version of a religion supported by the United States or other powerful interests to carry more weight, politically, than others.

To prioritize "religion" as a category in law and policy is a complex and risky proposition. The goal should be to see individuals in civic terms and to insist on equality before the law. Governments should work on behalf of citizens and humans — rather than Christians, Jews, Muslims or Hindus.

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For that reason, he says, a secular legal system is the best way to protect Sharia as a guide for religious practice. ■

CURRENT SITUATION

U.S. Foreign Policy

American religious freedom activists argue that sectarian conflicts in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings and a rise in sectarian violence in Afghanistan and postwar Iraq show that religious freedom should be a higher priority in U.S. foreign policy.

"We seem blind to religion and religious freedom, even when we're taking on geopolitical issues that stem in large part from religious freedom issues, as in Egypt or in Syria today, for example," the Hudson Institute's Shea says. "Syria today is, at its core, a war between Sunnis and Shiites. It's important to acknowledge that, because if there's ever to be stability in this region, we have to develop policies to protect minorities and advance the rights of all these groups. We're very much lagging behind on that."

Critics of the U.S. government's handling of religious freedom issues complain that all three presidential administrations that have been in power since the Religious Freedom Act was passed in 1998 have been "anemic" and "largely rhetorical" about enforcing the law. At a House Oversight Subcommittee on National Security hearing in June, Georgetown University's Farr said, "While Congress appropriates millions of dollars annually for democracy and counterterrorism programs, little of that money is spent on promoting religious liberty." [68]

The Obama administration also has come in for criticism. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's Bashir wrote this year that Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry "should use their bully pulpit to speak out with far more frequency on religious prisoners of conscience" and not just on obvious cases involving the main U.S. adversary in the region, Iran. [69]

The Obama administration has named so-called countries of particular concern (CPC) just once, in 2011, Bashir says; under the law, the State Department is supposed to make the designations annually. There was a similar lapse of attention to the list under the George W. Bush administration, Bashir says.

"The CPC tool is only as effective as the administration in power will use it," he says.

In some cases, countries such as Saudi Arabia, a close U.S. ally, make the State Department's list of top abusers but receive waivers. In other cases, the State Department uses existing sanctions as penalties for CPCs.

The Obama administration has taken some steps to raise the profile of religion in U.S foreign policy, creating a religion and foreign policy working group and developing a strategy for engaging religious leaders and faith communities abroad. In July, Kerry announced the creation of the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives at the State Department, headed by Shaun Casey, a Christian ethicist and former Obama campaign adviser.

"I'm not naïve," Casey told *The Washington Post*. "I understand that this territory is fraught. But having said that, I think we ignore the political impact of religion at our peril." [70]

Although religious freedom advocates welcomed the news, others, such as Northwestern's Hurd, worry that emphasizing relationships with religious groups could alienate other groups. "When we focus on religion and religious freedom and religious engagement, I think we end up making religious difference more salient in a way that is actually not helpful in resolving some of these conflicts on the ground," she says.

Some religious groups have been pressing for congressional action on behalf of Christians and other religious minorities facing persecution in the Muslim world. In September, the U.S. House overwhelmingly passed — 402-22 — a bill co-sponsored by Reps. Wolf and Anna Eshoo, D-Calif., that would create a special State Department envoy focusing exclusively on the plight of religious minorities in South Central Asia and the Middle East.

"Will a special envoy guarantee these communities' survival?" Wolf asked, as he introduced the bill on Sept. 18. "I do not know. But I am certain that to do nothing is not an option, lest on this administration's and this Congress' watch we witness a Middle East emptied of ancient faith communities." [71]

It is unclear whether the Senate will take up the bill. Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., has sponsored a similar measure, but it remains in committee. [72]

View Abroad

In June, the European Union issued its first-ever guidelines on freedom of religion or belief, which are aimed at helping EU officials and member countries' embassies understand, monitor and promote religious freedom abroad. The guidelines, which encompass theistic and atheistic beliefs, provide for the right of EU member states to impose trade or other sanctions against countries that violate freedom of religion or belief. [73]

The European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination, a network of faith groups and civil society organizations, called the guidelines "a major step forward" and declared freedom of religion or belief "a litmus test for other human rights and fundamental freedoms." [74] Christian leaders in Europe also welcomed the guidelines and promised to monitor their implementation. [75]

Antiblasphemy laws have been hotly debated in Europe. In July, Russia criminalized acts "committed with the

aim of religious offense to believers." The law imposes fines and a possible two-year prison term. [76] Muslims in Europe have been pressing for the enforcement of blasphemy laws, but some European countries have begun scrapping them. The Netherlands removed blasphemy from its penal code last year. [77] Ireland passed an antiblasphemy law in 2009, but since then atheists and other groups have been working for a repeal. [78] ■

OUTLOOK

Democracy and Reform

For Khan, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA spokesman, the U.N.'s periodic review process, which requires each member nation to declare every four years what they have done to improve their human rights record, promises to improve compliance with international laws that classify freedom of religion as a basic right.

"That's prompting countries to accede to treaties," he says.

Mirahmadi, of the World Organization for Resource Development and Education, sees democracy-building as an important part of improving the international climate for religious freedom and foresees a greater role for the United States. "When I say democracy, I don't mean the right to vote," she says. "I mean building a democratic society, helping nondemocratic countries understand what it means to build a civil society infrastructure, understanding what it means to run NGOs, to support causes, to do grassroots campaigning.

"I've always advocated for us to demonstrate America's role as a superpower, to share the intellectual power that makes us great," she says. "These kinds of things we could share with these struggling nations, so that they could respond."

Turkey, Egypt and Tunisia are debating the role of religion in their constitutions. In its 2013 report on Turkey, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom noted that many believe Turkey's revised national constitution will support greater human rights, including religious freedom. [79]

Hanna, of the Century Foundation, is watching the debate over religion as Egypt's 50-member constitutional committee goes about amending the nation's constitution, adopted last year. Several provisions — particularly ones defining Sharia law and circumscribing freedom of belief in a way that may exclude some religious minorities and nonbelievers — are problematic, he says. [80]

"I think the forces of toleration will lose, but it's different because it's being talked about," Hanna says.

Abdeslam Maghraoui, an associate professor of political science at Duke University, thinks the failure of the Morsi government in Egypt, which attempted to push through a constitution that critics said favored Islamists at the expense of religious minorities, offers a lesson about the importance of religious freedom as countries in the Middle East take steps toward reform.

"Can you really have democracy without some degree of freedom of religion? My answer is 'no,' Maghraoui says. "People have different degrees of religiosity. Some of them are not religious at all. You have to come to that understanding about religious difference, fundamentally, between Islam and non-Muslims, but also within your own society.

"My sense is that eventually Islamist parties will get to this conclusion, that it is impossible to ignore other faiths, and that it is impossible to impose one Islamic faith on every single Muslim. Just because you are voted in by a majority of 50 percent or 53 percent does not mean you have the mandate to impose those views."

The Arab Spring unleashed "this big fundamental question about 'what is the role of religion in public life going to be?' " says Maghraoui. "This is not simply a process of democratic transition. It is much deeper, much more passionate. It might take a long time for the religious issue to be resolved in the Muslim world, and it might be violent."

However, Maghraoui asks, "Why would the religious renewal in the Muslim world be less violent than the Christian Reformation?" ■

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Christian Freedom International, P.O. Box 535, Front Royal, VA 22630; 800-323-2273; www.christianfreedom.org. Conducts relief work and advocacy for Christians persecuted for their faith.

Hudson Institute Center for Religious Freedom, Hudson Institute, Inc., 1015 15th St., N.W., 6th Floor, Washington, DC 20005; 202-974-2400; crf.hudson.org. Defends against religious persecution of all groups throughout the world.

Institute for Global Engagement, P.O. Box 12205, Arlington, VA 22219-2205; 703-527-3100; www.globalengage.org. A faith-based Christian think tank that focuses on religion and global affairs.

International Coalition for Religious Freedom, 3600 New York Ave., N.E., Third Floor, Washington, DC 20002; 202-558-5462; www.religiousfreedom.com. Works on issues related to religious freedom; receives the bulk of its funding from the Unification Church community.

International Institute for Religious Freedom, Branches in Bonn, Germany and Capetown, South Africa; www.iirf.eu. An international academic network that compiles data on violations of religious freedom.

Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, Ovre Slottsgate 11, NO-0157 Oslo; 47 23136670; www.oslocenter.no/en/. Works on issues of human rights, democracy and inter-religious and intercultural dialogue.

Quilliam Foundation, P.O. Box 60380, London, WC1A 9AZ, UK; 44 (0) 207 182 7280; www.quilliamfoundation.org. A think tank established to counter extremism and promote democracy and religious freedom.

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