Do actors with genuine religious beliefs fight wars and commit atrocities in the name of religion? Or is religion just a proxy for materialist objectives such as the acquisition of territory? Scholars have argued for centuries about the relative importance of religion in determining behavior. In the West, however, there is a tendency to discount religiously based motivations as mere red herrings, relics of a time before the nation-state. This is understandable given the importance of the nation-state over the last few centuries and the relevance of material factors, domestic politics, and nationalism in explaining international conflict.¹

Yet scholars such as Timothy Shah and Monica Toft have noted the growing significance of religion in politics around the world.² In a globalizing world that is loosening the connection of individuals to particular geographic locations and nation-states, the propensity for factors such as religion—a form of identity construction that transcends the nation-state—to influence warfare may be on the rise once again. For example, Toft finds that religiously motivated civil wars are significantly more destructive than other kinds of civil war.³ According to the U.S. government, the United States’ opponents in the so-called global war on terrorism (renamed “overseas contingency operations” by President Barack Obama’s administration) subscribe to a particular vision of Islam that they claim legitimizes violence against the United States, the West, and even other Muslims.⁴ The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review argues that the United States is engaged in a war against terrorists who justify their

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actions in the name of Islam.\textsuperscript{5} And while a vigorous debate about the relevance of religion to America’s opponents continues, it is undeniable that the specter of religious warfare has risen once again.\textsuperscript{6}

Do actors who espouse religious motivations for fighting wars possess behavioral tendencies that differ from those of their nonreligious counterparts? The question is not whether religion, per se, is a force for good or evil. The issue is complex, and religious devotion can lead to peace as well as war. Rather, this article examines the question of whether the use of religion as an argument in favor of warfare leads to different behavior. The ability of religion to infuse believers with a certainty of purpose and the promise of something better in the afterlife can influence decisionmaking in the military arena in ways that, for a believer, can make war a good in itself, rather than a means to an end. Given the nonmaterial motivations for fighting, religiously motivated warfare can therefore last longer and impose higher costs than other kinds of warfare. Religion therefore deserves analytical consideration in security studies alongside other elements of identity construction, such as ethnicity and language, or factors such as material capabilities and regime type.

The Catholic Crusading movement provides a useful test for the plausibility of the argument that religion may influence the behavior of followers in wartime. The evidence shows that it is impossible to comprehend the persistence of Crusading over a several-hundred-year period, from the call for the First Crusade in 1096 until the late sixteenth century, without understanding the religious devotion of its participants and champions. Shrugging off spectacular failures and rising costs, the institution of Crusading continued for centuries, suggesting that material instrumental factors were not primary motivators. The trajectory of the Crusading movement has relevance for scholars interested in the relationship between religion and war, policymakers interested in the trajectories of religiously motivated campaigns, and those interested more generally in the interplay of ideas and international politics.

In addition, the legacy of the Crusading movement remains with us today. For example, Osama bin Laden and other Salafi jihadis have described the actions of the West in the 1990s and following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks as the next generation of “Crusading.”\textsuperscript{7} President George W. Bush

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characterized U.S. actions in the aftermath of the attacks as a “crusade,” though he quickly retracted this highly controversial comment. The analogy is interesting for several reasons, not least of which is that Crusading in the Levant ended in 1291 with the defeat at Tyre and the ejection of the European Crusaders. In addition, as a military campaign that lasted significantly longer than any of its individual components, the Crusades may have conceptual relevance for contemporary campaigns such as the United States’ global war on terrorism that transcend any individual geographic location or action. The Crusades are among the most well known and most referenced periods in history, providing a useful lens for understanding some of today’s conflicts.

Despite the Obama administration’s shift in language away from the global war on terrorism, Salafi jihadi movements have promised to continue their activities. The United States will probably maintain its involvement in foreign conflicts, some more formally, such as the war in Afghanistan, and some more informally, such as operations in the Philippines against Abu Sayyaf and other terrorist groups. The indefinite nature and scope of U.S. foreign military commitments in this regard transcend simple description as conventional warfare. This suggests that the lessons of campaigns such as the Crusades are valuable both for understanding the trajectory of religiously oriented transnational movements and for studying the trajectory of indefinite nonreligious campaigns such as the global war on terrorism.

In what follows, I establish the importance of studying the relationship between religion and war and describe the ways religiously motivated actors might extend military campaigns for longer than would otherwise be expected. I then test this argument using the case of the Crusades, explaining how religion shaped the institution and its duration. Later I describe why more structural explanations cannot account for the endurance of this institution. I conclude with a discussion of the relevance of the Crusades for thinking about the issue of religion and war more generally, especially in a period where the relevance of religion for international politics is on the rise.

10. This is not to say the war on terrorism is a crusade.
Studying Religion and War

International relations scholars traditionally do not discuss religion as a useful way to frame the United States’ ongoing struggles in the Middle East and with violent Islamist groups. This tendency reflects dominant perspectives in the social sciences that instead focus on material, quantifiable ways of explaining international politics. Because religion often deals with the unseen, it is frequently grouped with other nonrational, nonmaterial worldviews.

This article approaches the issue of religion from an empirical perspective, laying out a theory and offering evidence to demonstrate how religion, when it becomes salient, influences warfare. There is a growing body of research by international relations scholars that discusses how the ideas people hold and the identities they assume affect their behavior. Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko Herrera, Alaistair Iain Johnston, and Rose McDermott’s work on the study of identity issues in political science defines “collective identity” as “a social category that varies along two dimensions—content and contestation”—and it highlights the discipline’s need to understand the importance of “identity” issues. To that end, researchers have examined topics from nationalism and ethnicity to gender, and have employed a variety of methodologies, from qualitative process tracing to quantitative analysis and formal models.

Some academics and policy analysts have also examined the relevance of religion in international politics, focusing in many cases on terrorist movements. Toft’s research has found that an increasing proportion of civil wars

feature religion as a key motivating factor and that these conflicts are much more deadly than civil wars in which religion is not an important factor. Ron Hassner’s work on sacred spaces similarly shows how the religious relevance of territory can ratchet up the frequency and intensity of some conflicts.17 Daniel Nexon highlights the way transnational religious networks during the Reformation crossed traditional societal boundaries. According to Nexon, these networks generated significant and sometimes destructive challenges to early modern European states. Religious contention played a substantive role influencing international conflict and European state formation.18

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, public figures such as Madeline Albright and scholars such as Daniel Philpott have written more metatheoretical pieces on religion and war, looking at how religious traditions can be forces for peace as well as war and the way religion may challenge the Westphalian nation-state system.19 Shah, Toft, and Philpott have begun a large-scale project on religion and international politics that brings together scholars from around the world.20 Research by Jonathan Fox on religious violence and Brian Lai on wars in the Middle East seeks to explain the importance of religion in the international security environment.21 John Owen’s work on transnational ideologies and alliance formation, though not directly about religion, suggests how certain elements of identity, such as religion, can influence behavior.22


20. For information on the Initiative on Religion in International Affairs, see http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/project/57/religion_in_international_affairs.html.
A few international relations scholars have examined the Crusades. For example, part of the debate about the role of ideas in international politics between Markus Fischer, on one side, and Rodney Hall and Friedrich Kratochwil, on the other, centered on interpreting the Crusades. Hall, in particular, pointed to the role of genuine belief in motivating many of the Crusades, especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The extreme cost of the Crusades made them highly risky and meant that they were “not primarily a material enterprise.” Hall also illustrated the role of the Crusades in helping to establish and reify the moral authority of the medieval Catholic Church. Tal Alkopher looks at the institutional context that shaped Crusading, showing how social processes helped the papacy to rally support for this movement, especially for midperiod Crusades such Frederick II’s. This article builds on that body of work.

How Religion Influences the Length of Military Campaigns

Understanding what happens after religious forces are motivated to engage in war requires a step back to frame the study of religion. Scholars have argued over the definition of religion for centuries. For the purposes of this article, religion is understood as a set of beliefs generally regarding the supernatural and involving practices designed to explain and justify existence. This is a contingent definition, however, and it may be most useful when discussing the major Abrahamic religions (i.e., Christianity, Islam, and Judaism).

Religious belief systems may influence the conduct of war through many
causal pathways, but two major facets of religious identity seem most relevant at the outset. First, religious beliefs make a higher-order claim on behavior than do claims by groups organized along purely ethnic, linguistic, or cultural lines. It is hard to argue with the messenger of God telling you what to do—the behavioral demands are absolute compared to the sometimes ambiguous behavioral norms of citizenship. The inherent truth of religious logic, therefore, can theoretically justify the pursuit of certain ends through any means necessary, legitimizing warfare in some cases. Second, the ability of religion to make claims about eternity is a powerful motivator. Religious beliefs elucidate how to weigh costs and benefits. In some cases, they can de-emphasize physical survival in favor of spiritual reward. From the idea of reincarnation after death in Hinduism to the idea of Heaven in the Abrahamic traditions, a critical component of some religions is explaining the afterlife. Believing that the reward for a particular action is eternal life in paradise can induce behavior that would otherwise seem unnecessarily risky, given its potential to result in death.

The ability of religion to explain the afterlife also can minimize individuals’ fear of death, making them more likely to engage in dangerous behavior such as warfare, especially when war itself becomes virtuous because of its religious mandate. This may matter for both foot soldiers and leaders. An explanation from a Wahhabi participant in the Ikhwan rebellion in the Najd Desert in 1925 demonstrates how religious fervor can influence behavior in war. The participant states, “We had again and again been told of the great reward that would come to us from God for every infidel we slew, and we believed what we were told implicitly. Nay more, we were promised immediate Heaven and glorious houris there, if we were fortunate enough to get killed.”

ents frequently make uncompromising claims about behavior based on the text. This makes bargaining and compromises on issues seen as “religious” difficult.

30. This behavior does not necessarily follow from religious belief, but a violent actor motivated by religion might use that logic.
32. The Abrahamic traditions contain many differences. For example, there is no equivalent to the papacy in modern Islam (or other variations of Christianity).
33. Even if the marginal payoff from religiously inspired, violent martyrdom seems low from an economic maximization perspective, whether or not others weigh costs and benefits differently is the relevant empirical question.
34. The Ikhwan, a strict group of Wahhabi Muslims in modern-day Saudi Arabia, rebelled against the British presence in the Arabian Peninsula and the modernization plans of Abdul Aziz al-Saud, the first head of modern Saudi Arabia.
The idea that individual sacrifice is necessary to allow a particular religion to survive also could motivate individuals, though the notion of dying for something larger than oneself is not unique to religion. Those willing to die for nationalistic or ethnic causes also do so to perpetuate the survival of the group. Religiously based motivations therefore share with other motivating factors the possibility that actions can further group survival, but they add the unique possibility of individual salvation.

The nonmaterial interests for conflict generated by religious motivations can influence how actors evaluate the value of fighting, including the utility gained from war and when to give up. It is possible to derive more general predictions related to the initiation, conduct, and termination of religiously motivated wars from the initial insights above. This article focuses on the length of military campaigns because it has been understudied even by those who focus on religion. Studying the length of the Crusades is related but distinct from the war duration/war protraction literature, which mostly evaluates individual wars between states or wars between competitors for control of the state in civil wars. The Crusades transcended individual wars. The causal mechanisms driving war duration may be similar, however. Religion—or ideational notions more broadly—generally fall outside the realpolitik and regime-specific variables explored by Scott Bennett and Allan Stam in their research on interstate war duration. Darren Filson and Suzanne Werner, among others, view war as a bargaining process. They explain how even after a war starts, bargaining continues as participants discover information about the capabilities of both sides and their willingness to fight. The inclusion of religion forces a recognition of how socially constructed values may sometimes influence whether participants wish to fight and for how long.
Studying religion as a motivating factor also links this project to scholarly work on the duration of civil wars. Some of the greed or grievance literature looks at the way different motivations among rebel groups influence civil war duration. Paul Collier, Anke Hoffler, and Mans Söderbom find that goals such as freedom from repression increase civil war duration because participants are highly motivated, even in the face of large-scale costs. Paul Collier, Anke Hoffler, and Mans Söderbom find that goals such as freedom from repression increase civil war duration because participants are highly motivated, even in the face of large-scale costs. Paul Collier, Anke Hoffler, and Mans Söderbom find that goals such as freedom from repression increase civil war duration because participants are highly motivated, even in the face of large-scale costs.40 Roy Licklider shows that civil wars over identity issues, including religion, are likely to last longer.41 What is the actual relationship between religion and duration if religion becomes relevant during a conflict?

Essentially, religion can shift individual- and group-level calculations about the utility gained from continuing to fight. Religious motivations could have a bimodal impact on the length of military campaigns. The absolute character of religious mobilization, which exacerbates the “othering” process common in warfare, could spur a greater desire to eradicate enemies and seek decisive battles—ambitions that would make military campaigns shorter. On the other hand, when decisive conclusions are impossible, religiously motivated campaigns are likely to last especially long and may create outcomes akin to militarized enduring rivalries.42 Although this article focuses on the latter scenario, some initial data-gathering efforts on warfare prior to 1800 show the existence of a bimodal split for religiously motivated military campaigns.43

Religion may lead to longer military campaigns because the act of fighting yields spiritual benefits, and because religious motivations may make compromise too difficult to pursue.44 Religion can also lead participants to value particular pieces of territory beyond the material resources contained within them. The combination of individual spiritual benefits for participation and religious attachment to territory makes compromise harder, lengthening war du-
This is not to claim that private information, realpolitik factors, and regime-specific factors do not matter. Rather, when religion is activated as a variable, meaning it becomes relevant, it too may influence the length of a war.

Several other factors also help to explain the relationship between religion and the length of military campaigns. First, religiously motivated actors might fight for a long time because the same impulses that ratchet up war intensity could delay actors changing their behavior (updating) when conflicts go poorly, as intense desire clouds judgment. Second, given the spiritual as well as potential material benefits to participation in religiously motivated campaigns, these conflicts are more likely to continue beyond the point at which achieving the material goals of the campaign becomes unlikely. The belief that participation in a religiously mandated military campaign could help to ensure salvation or some other spiritual benefit also could generate incentives for reinitiation of the war at a later time. Third, the initial failure of a campaign need not represent as great a barrier to reentry for religiously motivated participants, given the extraworldly incentives for fighting. These motivators create the possibility that efforts to achieve religious ends may lead to more indefinite military campaigns with a significantly greater number of different components than most traditional wars. Although some wars, such as World War I, continue after the point at which they appear to become inefficient—that is, participants are not moving closer to achieving their goals—others endure because of the role of religious motivation. For example, in the early Islamic and Ottoman periods, both empires engaged in Ghazi warfare, raiding on the border between Islamic and non-Islamic lands. The spiritual rewards inherent in participation made these wars seemingly indefinite—participants fought even when a clear material goal was absent. These types of campaigns might have characteristics different than those of long wars because of their inchoate goals and characteristics. The result is that where religious leaders are able to establish the possibility for participants to receive spiritual benefits but where decisive battles are not possible, military campaigns designed to achieve religious ends are likely to be longer than campaigns that feature only material ends.

Another related literature is scholarship on war termination, but as with the literature on war duration, this article tests the durability of the institution of

45. This extends Toft’s argument about rationalist explanations for war and the importance of issue indivisibility. Toft, “Indivisible Territory, Geographic Concentration, and Ethnic War,” pp. 36–39. See also Hassner, “Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground.”
46. This intensity might also lead to either more or less effective warfighting on the individual level.
47. This is not to say that religious motivations influenced World War I.
Crusading rather than the length of each individual war. Fred Iklé argues that war termination occurs when the domestic political coalition that supports the war splits, bringing a new dominant coalition to power that pushes to end the conflict. This is the process that arguably occurred at the end of World War I, when the failure of Germany’s spring 1918 offensive, along with continuing domestic hardships, produced major changes in German domestic politics that brought about a dominant coalition that supported making peace. A similar process might occur at the end of religiously motivated campaigns, except with the fissuring of religious movements rather than national governments.

The argument in this article presumes that the religious beliefs of participants in religiously motivated wars are genuine; it is possible, however, that religion serves merely as a rationalization or justification for their behavior. Although this would make an interesting topic for future research, for the purpose of this article, it matters less whether religion genuinely motivates actors or whether religion is used strategically. Religious motivations are still relevant if the strategic use of religion is correlated with behavior different from that exhibited in conflicts without religious rhetoric, because scholars could then examine religious justifications to track participant behavior in military disputes.

Why Study the Crusades Today?

Some observers argue that, in a globalizing world, the absolute power of the nation-state is declining. Globalization raises the possibility that other factors might start to influence how people assign loyalties and make decisions. Thus, theories that have best explained warfare in the post-Napoleonic nation-state period might require modification to explain warfare in the future, including the role of religion. Religion was a significant factor in the international politics of the pre-Westphalian period. This article applies the insights

50. Although I touch on issues of termination, a more complete treatment is beyond the scope of this article.
52. Philpott, “The Challenge of September 11 to Secularism in International Relations.”
laid out above to the case of the Catholic Crusades, a movement with particular relevance today given the continuing fascination of Salafi jihadis and many in the West with the period. In particular, by studying transnational religious movements such as the Crusades, scholars can learn lessons that might be useful in trying to determine what an end to the contemporary Salafi jihadi movement might look like.

Analytically, this article treats the Crusades as a campaign, rather than as individual events, for two reasons: first, this method conforms to much of the scholarship on the Crusades; and second, it acknowledges the character of some of the ongoing conflicts around the world. For example, as defined by the U.S. government, the war on terrorism includes not only the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but also military operations in many other countries. Thus, defining the duration of the war on terrorism based solely on the duration of the Iraq War would not make sense. The war on terrorism includes a military campaign with many different parts of varying duration. Therefore, conceptually, it is useful to study broad historical campaigns that were greater than their individual parts.

Salafi jihadism is a transnational religious movement with both territorial and nonterritorial goals. Salafi jihadists have engaged in conflicts across the globe over several decades. The Crusades, too, featured a multiplicity of actions across continents over an extended time period, which makes them a useful historical case for understanding some of the strategic challenges that face the West as it confronts the Salafi jihadi movement. In addition, from the standpoint of religious sociology, the Crusades represented a major shift in religious beliefs and practices. Such change is not altogether common and is an important area for inquiry.

Some scholars might argue that the Crusades pose too “easy” a case for study, because their underlying theme was allegedly religious. There are, however, strong materialist explanations for the Crusades that occupy a prominent place in the scholarship. Moreover, even if the Crusades are an easy case, scholars currently lack concrete knowledge about the empirical relationship

53. It makes sense to study the phenomenon of Crusading, rather than the duration of individual Crusades, because most scholars tend to conceptualize the Crusades as a wide-ranging phenomenon even when they examine specific instances. Also, given that popes used similar language when launching Crusades, it makes sense theologically to evaluate them together. Finally, it is often difficult to establish precise dates for war duration in the premodern period. When campaigning was geographically limited and constrained by the seasons, actors often fought a battle or two per year for several years without resolving the underlying dispute. Thus it is difficult to determine if that counts as one war or several wars.

between religion and war. This case establishes the plausibility of religious explanations for conflict in some situations and suggests that further research is needed to show when and how religion may influence warfare.

Explaining the Length of the Crusades

This section presents a plausibility probe of the potential importance of theological shifts in explaining military campaigns under the conditions laid out above. The puzzle it seeks to address is why the institution of Crusading lasted nearly 500 years, from the end of the eleventh century to the end of the sixteenth century, despite the huge material costs Crusading imposed on the participants and societies involved.

Given the increasing costs and failures of the Crusades, purely material factors cannot explain their persistence. In fact, even though financial costs and a legacy of defeat gradually eroded popular support for the institution, they could not deliver the final blow. The phenomenon of Crusading in some ways exemplifies the way religion can influence patterns of warfare and the idea of institutional lock-in (i.e., when institutions persist long after their original reason for existence ceases to drive the relevant actors). All in all, the institution of Crusading survived its initial core campaigns in the Levant and on the Iberian Peninsula by several hundred years, an amazing record of longevity.

Definition of the Crusades

For the purposes of this article, I define a Crusade as a specific type of military mission called for by the Pope. A Crusade was a modified armed pilgrimage that offered participants the remission of all sin—a plenary indulgence also known as the Crusading indulgence—in exchange for serving God. Thus, I define Crusades based on their theology, not exclusively as the set of Christian attempts to conquer the Holy Land. This definition therefore includes Crusades on the Iberian Peninsula, as well as in eastern Europe and elsewhere, consistent with the “pluralist” school of Crusading historiography. At the

56. Crusading indulgences were often plenary indulgences, but plenary indulgences were not confined to the Crusades.
57. Alkopher, “The Social (and Religious) Meanings That Constitute War,” pp. 723–724. One difference between this article and Alkopher’s is that he relies on the traditionalist definition of Crusading.
same time, it excludes some engagements popularly considered Crusades, such as those of Peter the Hermit prior to the launch of the First Crusade in 1096 and the Children’s Crusade in 1212.\textsuperscript{59}

Crusading theology initially flowed from the idea of just warfare as penance, in which participation was considered a spiritual positive (similar to praying), because it incurred the risk of death for the purposes of promoting the goals of the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{60} Penitential warfare represented a large-scale change in Catholic thinking on Christian holy war. The theology of the Crusades eventually came to grant spiritual benefits regardless of death, benefits so extensive that theologians such as Thomas Aquinas worried that the Crusaders might interpret indulgences as “get out of hell” free cards, leading to sinful behavior after they returned home.\textsuperscript{61} Additionally, several scholars claim that some popes viewed Crusaders as armed pilgrims.\textsuperscript{62}

The Norman invasion of England in 1066 demonstrates the distinction between the dominant theological interpretation of warfare in the mid-eleventh century and Crusading theology at the end of the twelfth century. Pope Alexander II explicitly approved the invasion in response to a request by William the Conqueror. After the Battle of Hastings, in which both sides took casualties in the thousands but the Normans triumphed, the Norman warriors confessed their sins and did penance.\textsuperscript{63} The religious authorities accompany-

\textsuperscript{59} Neither received a spiritual grant from the Pope.
\textsuperscript{60} Riley-Smith, \textit{What Were the Crusades?} p. 56.
\textsuperscript{61} James A. Brundage, \textit{Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), pp. 151–153. Over time, consistent with the Church’s declining emphasis on penance, the theology shifted to de-emphasize the penitential aspect of Crusading.
\textsuperscript{63} David S. Bachrach, \textit{Religion and the Conduct of War, c. 300–1215} (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell, 2003), p. 152.
ing the invasion force believed that, despite papal approval, the act of killing was inherently sinful and required penitential action to expunge the warriors’ sin.64 Had the invasion been a Crusade, no apology would have been necessary, because the soldiers would have received a crusading indulgence from the Pope.

In November 1095 Pope Urban II called for the First Crusade at Clermont. No definitive explanation for Urban’s decision exists, but some scholars trace the Crusades to the peace of god/truce of god movement or the intellectual ferment around Pope Gregory VII and the monastic “reform” movement in the 1060s and 1070s, which sought to extend the authority of the Church over what Church officials believed was a corrupt world.65 Tracing the development of Crusading theology does not explain the timing of their initiation, however.

Structural explanations for the beginning of the Crusades are limited. For example, internal conflicts within Catholicism, such as the Investiture Controversy between Pope Gregory VII and King Henry IV, did not cause the Pope to launch a Crusade as a “diversionary” war against a foreign threat in an effort to bolster his support. Rather, the Investiture Controversy may have delayed the onset of the Crusading era by diverting resources and time from a Crusade that Pope Gregory VII meant to launch in 1074.66 Some scholars have argued that Pope Urban II was really responding to pleas for help against the Muslims from Emperor Alexius I of Byzantium. A request for assistance by Alexius I in March 1095 did gain the support of Urban II, continuing the policy of Gregory VII. Possible reasons for Urban II’s support include a desire to reconcile with the Eastern Orthodox Church and extend the power of the papacy. Although Alexius I did not request a Crusade to Jerusalem, according to Riley-Smith, this objective had been in the mind of Urban II for a while.67 Finally, even if the material interests of the papacy played an important role in the initiation of the Crusades, the ability of theology to motivate the population mattered as well, and the material arguments should have lost their persuasive appeal centuries before they did, given the Crusades’ legacy of defeat.68

64. Peter Partner, God of Battles: Holy Wars of Christianity and Islam (London: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 67. For the soldiers, the requirements for penance were highly detailed: for example, one year per man killed, forty days per man struck, three days for wishing to kill a man. Bachrach, Religion and the Conduct of War, pp. 101–102.
65. Riley-Smith, What Were the Crusades? Although not the immediate predecessor to Urban II (Victor III was in between), Gregory VII set in motion key theological and practical reforms.
67. Riley-Smith, What Were the Crusades?
68. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF CRUSADING

Followers gathered wherever Urban II appeared after the Clermont speech, in particular following a meeting between Bishop Adhemar of Le Puy, his official representative on the Crusade, and Count Raymond IV of Toulouse, one of the Crusade’s military leaders.69 Word spread throughout western Europe.

As in later Crusades, a combination of religious devotion and kin/social networks played a large role in determining who participated in the First Crusade. Many Crusaders came from religious families and networks, such as those of Polignac and Thouars.70 Others were vassals recruited by their medieval lords. When Count Stephen of Blois took the Crusading vow, many men in his home region of Chartres followed his example. Strong support for Crusading by Count Fulk IV of Anjou and King Philip of France likely helped to encourage many knights to take the cross.71 The importance of family ties often spanned generations.72 The costs of Crusading also explain the importance of kin and social networks. Not only did knights have to pay their own way, but they knew that they would likely lose money, and potentially their lives, during the campaign. Crusading represented a large financial investment that required pooling family resources or soliciting the support of lords and religious communities.73

Following the First Crusade, which concluded with the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 after a series of near disasters, the story of the Crusading movement in the Levant from 1148 (the beginning of the Second Crusade) to 1291 is one of actions ranging from draws to total failures, with the latter occurring much more frequently. Infighting and logistical difficulties led to the defeat of the army of the Second Crusade outside Damascus in July 1148.74 Richard I of England and Philip II of France launched the Third Crusade following the capture of Jerusalem by Muslim leader Saladin. Although their armies were able to retake the coastline and experience other early successes, they ultimately failed to take Jerusalem and retired in 1192. The Fourth Crusade, initiated in 1201 by Pope Innocent III, ended in the sack of Constantinople.75

72. Third Crusade leaders Richard I, Guy of Lusignan, and Raymond of Tripoli all descended from Almoids of La Marche, the mother of First Crusade military leader Raymond of St. Gilles.
then proposed a series of reforms designed to reinvigorate Crusading by formalizing the movement’s spiritual benefits and institutionalizing its financing.\textsuperscript{76} His actions led to the failed Fifth Crusade, which lasted from 1217 to 1221, and the first Crusade against an internal heresy, launched against the heterodox Cathars/Albigensians from 1209 to 1229 in the French Languedoc.\textsuperscript{77}

At the end of the Sixth Crusade, Frederick II of the Holy Roman Empire negotiated a ten-year treaty that gave Jerusalem to the Crusaders in 1229, but Muslims retook the city in 1244.\textsuperscript{78} Four years later, Louis IX of France initiated the Seventh Crusade. He also launched the Eighth Crusade in 1270. Neither gained new territory or significantly aided the Crusader states in preserving already held territory.\textsuperscript{79} Edward I of England led Crusaders to Syria in 1271, but they left the next year after only limited fighting. In 1268 the Crusader stronghold at Antioch fell, eliminating the last strategic roadblock to full Muslim control of the Levant. Tripoli fell in 1289, followed by Acre in 1291, the final defeat of the Crusaders in the Levant.

Notwithstanding a century of defeat, enthusiasm for Crusading remained widespread among Catholics. The Second Council of Lyons, convened by Pope Gregory X in 1274, attempted to unify Catholic Europe for a large-scale Crusade. Although a failure, the effort reveals the high degree of elite support the movement continued to enjoy.\textsuperscript{80} The 1309 Popular Crusade and 1320 Second Shepherds’ Crusade in France and Germany provide similar examples.\textsuperscript{81} Between Lyons in 1274 and the next major Church council, held in

\textsuperscript{76} Riley-Smith, \textit{What Were the Crusades?} p. 11; and Christoph T. Maier, \textit{Preaching the Crusades: Mendicant Friars and the Cross in the Thirteenth Century} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 2–3. The financing system (i.e., the exchange of money as redemption for a Crusading vow) later evolved to become the sale of indulgences.


\textsuperscript{78} For descriptions of Frederick II en route to the Levant, see Philip de Novare, \textit{“Les Gestes des Ciprois, The Crusade of Frederick II, 1228–29,”} in \textit{Medieval Sourcebook}, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1228frederick2.html.

\textsuperscript{79} Tyerman, \textit{Fighting for Christendom}, pp. 62–64.


\textsuperscript{81} Both attracted thousands of followers; although similar to the First Shepherds’ Crusade of 1251 and the Children’s Crusade of 1212—previous Crusades that lacked papal authorization—they were unlikely to succeed even if they got off the ground. Norman Housley, \textit{“The Crusading Movement, 1274–1700,”} in Riley-Smith, \textit{The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades}, p. 263. See also Gary Dickson, \textit{The Children’s Crusade: Medieval History, Modern Mythistory} (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
Vienne in 1314, at least twenty-six recovery treatises—monographs written to propose strategies for a new Crusade in the Holy Land—were issued. French King Philip VI also planned a recovery Crusade in the 1330s.82

Crusades on the Iberian Peninsula began in the late eleventh or early twelfth century (almost as soon as Crusading to the Levant) and gradually reduced the Moorish sphere of influence.83 The Teutonic Crusade in Prussia was still ongoing during the fourteenth century, and new Crusades began against pagans and heretics in southeastern Europe, especially in Bohemia, the Aegean, and the Balkans.

The institutionalization of Crusading occurred even as the movement’s purpose began to change.84 The papacy authorized thirteen Crusades between the onset of the Black Death in 1347 and the end of the fourteenth century.85 Interestingly, these efforts continued even though the Black Death and continuous warfare between England and France “dealt hammer-blows to the political mobilization and fundraising on which large-scale crusading hinged.”86 Crusading by military orders, including the Hospitallers’ actions against the rising Ottoman Empire, took place throughout the fifteenth century.87 During this period, a series of internal Crusades transpired, including five failed Crusades against the Hussites by Bohemian emperor-elect Crusader Sigismund and his allies.88 Also, by the mid-to-late fifteenth century, fundraising through the sale of indulgences became more important than the devotional benefits of Crusading. Innocent II’s financing plan evolved into the much pilloried “sale of indulgences.” Religious officials sold indulgences to finance Crusades on twelve occasions in England between 1444 and 1502.89

The Crusading movement began to decline in the mid-sixteenth century. One way to date the onset of the decline is through high-level discussions of Church doctrine. The Fifth Lateran Council, convened in 1512 for five years,
extensively discussed the Ottoman threat and the necessity of a new pan-European Crusade.\textsuperscript{90} Less than a year after the last council meeting, Pope Leo X announced a new Crusading indulgence to generate funds to fight the Ottomans.\textsuperscript{91} A generation later, from 1545 to 1563, the Council of Trent convened in response to the challenge of the rapidly growing Protestant faith. The council would set in motion a period of reform that became known as the Counter-Reformation. Prohibiting the sale of indulgences, the Council of Trent included virtually no formal discussion of Crusading; the final decrees made no reference to the subject.

The last definitely known formal Crusade occurred about twenty years after the conclusion of the Council of Trent, when Pope Gregory XIII issued a Crusading bull to fund the Spanish war against England in the 1580s.\textsuperscript{92} Support for some of the military orders founded during the Crusades continued into the eighteenth century, but the Crusading movement had been over in a practical sense for some time.\textsuperscript{93}

**EMPIRICAL EXPLANATION FOR THE CRUSADES’ LONGEVITY**

The behavior of the Crusaders strongly supports the idea that religion played an important role in extending the Crusades long after other theories would predict their decline. Indeed, a new consensus has emerged in Crusading historiography suggesting that religious motivations formed the framework through which the Crusades operated. This does not mean that economic or geopolitical motivations were unimportant, but rather that religion played a unique role and that these factors should be evaluated together in context.\textsuperscript{94}

The combination of religious devotion and social and kinship networks drove the recruiting of Crusaders. The consistency of recruiting patterns from specific regions and families over time provides evidence for the social network explanation.\textsuperscript{95} As Riley-Smith writes, “Behind many Crusaders stood a large body of men and women who were prepared to sacrifice interest to...

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{91} Partner, *God of Battles*, pp. 188–189.
\textsuperscript{93} Housley, *The Later Crusades*, p. 454. There are some references to Crusading indulgences being offered to Spanish forces that attacked the English in Ireland in the early seventeenth century, but these claims have not been verified. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, p. 292.
\textsuperscript{95} Lloyd, “The Crusading Movement,” p. 50. Note that most knights in every generation did not Crusade. The argument here, however, is not that every knight engaged in Crusading, just that enough of them did to perpetuate the institution.
help them go. It is hard to avoid concluding that they were fired by the opportunity presented to a relative not only of making a penitential pilgrimage to Jerusalem but also of fighting in a holy cause.96

Actions by participants in the First Crusade also provide strong evidence in favor of religion as a causal explanation for their behavior. Although the doctrines of Crusading were not institutionalized until decades later, the First Crusade became a model for future generations. As such, examples from this event are still useful for illustrating behavior during the period as a whole.97 First, after the exultation that followed the “discovery” of the Holy Lance, the battle preparations of the Crusaders at Antioch in June 1098 consisted of fasting for three days. There is no conventional military reason for this behavior, though it was probably designed in part to boost morale by demonstrating the unity of the Crusaders. The Crusaders generally understood the importance of provisions—though they fasted and grew weaker, they continued feeding their horses so they would be strong for battle. Second, when the Crusaders reached Jerusalem and considered how to overcome its defenses, they decided to shed their armor and walk as unarmed pilgrims around the city, with some hoping that God’s pleasure at their devotion might trigger the collapse of the city’s walls, similar to Joshua and the walls of Jericho.98 In both cases, the best explanation for the behavior of the Crusaders is religious devotion and a belief that because they were doing God’s will, God would look out for them in the upcoming battle.

The interaction between Crusaders and churches in their home territories provides more evidence of religious explanations for Crusader behavior, as many Crusaders settled disputes with the Church before beginning their potentially deadly journeys. For example, Stephen of Blois gave land to the Marmoutier Abbey before the First Crusade. He explained his motivation as follows: “So that God, at the intercession of St. Martin and his monks, might pardon me for whatever I have done wrong and lead me on the journey out of my homeland and bring me back healthy and safe, and watch over my wife Adela and our children.”99

Evidence from charters, the documents left by Crusaders outlining the way they paid for Crusading and determining the distribution of their assets in case of death, similarly supports the argument that religious piety played an important role in influencing the Crusaders.100 If participants knew

98. Tyerman, God’s War, p. 157.
100. In addition to Riley-Smith, see also Giles Constable, “Medieval Charters as a Source for the
beforehand that Crusading was costly, it would suggest that noninstrumental motivations such as religious devotion may have factored into their decision-making. In general, most Crusaders had to raise funds for the expedition. Two prevalent methods of fundraising were the sale of land or the pledging of land, rights, churches, or other property in return for money. More than thirty surviving charters from the First Crusade detail the arrangements. Crusaders ranging from Burgundian Achard of Montmerle, a wealthy Crusader, to German Wolker of Kuffern pledged some of their property, often to religious institutions, to pay for the privilege of Crusading. Sometimes, as in the case of Achard of Montmerle, a Crusader pledged to give his land to the lender after his death.

Rather than the Crusades functioning as an economic opportunity, “the urgent need for coin” placed significant demands on the financing of medieval lords in the English case, with many forced to mortgage property or enter into disadvantageous loan agreements, among other fundraising schemes. Some scholars attribute the failure of the Fourth Crusade in part to funding shortages that drove Venetian ship owners to divert the expedition against the Byzantines. Crusading was much more expensive than a typical war in the Middle Ages. The total cost for a poor knight was about four times his annual income and probably presented a financial challenge for wealthier knights as well. The papacy recognized the high costs of Crusading from the outset; prior to the First Crusade, Urban II asked richer Crusaders to help subsidize their less wealthy counterparts. As Riley-Smith writes, “There is very little evidence for the Crusaders coming home wealthy. . . . All Crusaders had faced potentially crippling expenses, and they and their families had pledges to redeem.”

The best estimate of the total costs of a Crusade comes from the first Crusade of French King Louis IX between 1248 and 1254. In the early fourteenth century, the French government estimated that this Crusade cost him 1,537,570
livres tournois, or six times his annual income. When the expenses of Louis IX’s fellow Crusaders are included, the total was about 3,000,000 livres tournois, or twelve times his annual income. Given that Louis IX was one of the wealthiest leaders in Europe, the financial difficulties he experienced in sustaining a Crusading expedition demonstrate the enormous costs involved.106 James Powell’s data on the Fifth Crusade similarly show the enormous scale of the financial challenge, as does evidence presented by Philip Housley on Crusading in the fourteenth century.107

These high costs meant that individuals had little direct material incentive to participate in Crusading, especially given the mounting legacy of failure following the success of the First Crusade. The interaction between economics, material power, and religion was critical to their continuation. Crusades required an army, and money was necessary to raise an army. Also needed was a lord’s or a king’s willingness to let his forces travel far from home and risk death for objectives besides the power of the state. Nevertheless, virtually all Crusading historians agree that even though economic-related issues mattered, the spiritual element was crucial. James Brundage writes, “Although it would be foolish to deny the force of secular motives, it would be even more foolish to write off the force of a genuine, if at times grotesque, spirituality.”108

Separating the Crusades into two main periods—the era including and immediately after the Crusades to the Levant and then the subsequent few hundred years—demonstrates both the longevity of Crusading in its initial form and its stubborn persistence long after its original purpose had faded.109 In the first period, from the late eleventh century through the mid-fourteenth century, extreme costs and a clear and persistent legacy of failure were not enough to end the practice. Wave after wave of Crusaders left for the Levant and beyond, demonstrating the way religion served to lengthen the scope of the conflict. It is true that strategic motivations could have played a role despite the legacy of defeat, because participants in subsequent Crusades could have believed that victory was imminent. And it would be foolish to suggest that strategic motivations were unimportant. Nevertheless, Crusaders continued to think that victory was possible, which shows the way their belief in the holiness and justness of their cause might have shifted how they calculated the probability of victory.

109. In many cases, Crusaders were the aggressors, thus it is not surprising that the targets fought back.
In the second period, the shift to selling indulgences and the maturation of Crusading theology under Pope Innocent III, while accomplishing the goal of raising money to send Crusaders to the Levant throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, formalized the institution of Crusading and generated sunk costs and institutional incentives to perpetuate the practice. Work on path dependence and institutional lock-in is helpful in understanding Crusading from the late fourteenth century onward. The institution acquired a life of its own, with economic arrangements and residual popular support prolonging its hold over the population even though the environment had changed since 1095.110

The institution of Crusading, however, was insufficient to perpetuate itself absent religious motivations. Whereas scholars such as Paul Rousett have emphasized the changing character of Crusading away from religious motivations in the fourteenth century and toward financial incentives, Norman Housley and others who have examined new historical documentation have found that religious motivations remained—though in a different form from those of the early period.111 In the case of events such as the Crusade against Alexandria, led by Peter of Cyprus in 1365, and the Crusade mobilized by the Genoese in 1389–90, economic and religious incentives coincided. The very need for military leaders to link their actions to Crusading shows its continuing resonance among potential fighters. Although some of the campaigns would not have taken place without strategic and economic incentives, they also could not have occurred absent the institution of Crusading and genuine religious devotion among many of its participants.112 But even if one views this second period of Crusading as primarily driven by the institution itself, this still does not explain how Crusading endured given its legacy of failure.113

The available evidence demonstrates the importance of religious ideas in influencing behavior at the end of the Crusading era, in the mid-sixteenth century, during a period of significant Ottoman expansion. The Ottomans captured Constantinople in 1452 and Belgrade fell in 1521, giving the Ottomans a staging ground to launch an assault on the Hapsburg Empire.114 The Ottoman army reached the gates of Vienna on September 26, 1529. Although unsuccess-

113. As Tyerman argues, however, the narrative of decline is itself too simplistic—actions under the banner of Crusading continued for decades, through Crusades against the Turks and other actions, often by leaders who genuinely believed in them. Tyerman, God’s War, p. 836.
ful, the siege demonstrated the continuing Ottoman threat to Europe. Yet, despite France’s tradition of being one of the strongest supporters of Crusading and Christian Europe, in 1536 French King Francis I signed the first major European alliance with Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. In 1544, at the start of war between France and Spain, Francis I received military support from Suleiman in the form of an Ottoman naval fleet led by Khair ad-Din.115 The Crusading era ended as the Ottoman Empire was increasingly confronted by actors emphasizing national identity.116

This evidence does not mean that the costs and historical losses suffered during the Crusades were irrelevant to the institution. The mounting cost in lives, treasure, and bad feelings toward the papacy must have weighed greatly on European society. Thus, historical memory of the Crusades included very few victories beyond the First Crusade and during the Spanish reconquest.117 The societal reservoir of faith in the Church helped to limit the effectiveness of criticism after failures, while successful smaller-scale Crusades against heretics and papal opponents helped to prevent the collapse of the Crusading movement. As bigger losses piled up, however, they fueled alienation and skepticism about the value of Crusading. Skepticism about the institution also increased because of a perception of corruption and misuse of the Crusading ideal by the papacy, in the form of both constant “Crusading” against political opponents of the Pope and financial corruption.118

Economic, political, and geostrategic shifts undermined the support base of the Crusades within European society over time, but the impact was slow and incomplete. Support from society at large gradually eroded as more people became skeptical of Crusading, but only competing ideas in the combined form of Protestantism and a more secular nationalism delivered the final blows to the hold of the Crusading movement over society. Nexon explains how the religious ideas of the Reformation created networks that crossed traditional feudal lines, enabling powerful new political alliances that challenged both the Catholic Church and the early modern state. Although some states buckled under the pressure, others responded by nationalizing and partially seculariz-

115. Partner, God of Battles, p. 187.
116. The roots of national identities do go back much further. One contrary example to “nationalized” behavior is the Crusading indulgence likely given by Pope Calixtus III to the relief army sent to Belgrade in 1456 to lift the Ottoman siege. Housley, Contesting the Crusades, p. 135. One could also say that the institution of Crusading was abandoned because the soldiers of Europe would no longer rally around the papacy. This, however, begs the question of why Crusading was no longer seen as useful. Popes continued to try to rally Crusaders against the Ottomans throughout the period.
117. Other victories included conquests in the Baltic region.
ing political life. Essentially, Nexon’s finding about the political impact of the religious ideas in the Reformation helps to explain not only the early modern state issues he explores but also the death knell for Crusading, a transnational religious movement. The Reformation produced life-or-death challenges for feudal states, driving innovations in governance that undermined the possibility for transnational political activism for religious ends, whether Protestant or Catholic. As a testament to its resiliency, however, Crusading continued for more than a hundred years after its key period of decline.

This key period of decline in the Crusading movement occurred in the mid-sixteenth century, between the Fifth Lateran Council and the Council of Trent. The period was one of momentous change. It was in the context of this change—the rise of a serious Christian competitor to Catholicism and the first real challenge to Christian supremacy in Europe’s core since the Mongols, with a prominent Crusading nation cutting a deal with the source of the Ottoman threat to Europe in an attempt to damage another Christian power—that the Council of Trent convened. As explained above, by the end of the Council of Trent in 1563, the challenge of renewing Catholicism to respond to Protestantism did not include Crusading. It was at this point that the scales finally tipped.

Additionally, the solution of Protestant leaders to the threat posed by the Ottomans was, after some initial hesitation, that Protestants could fight with Catholics against the Ottomans as long as it occurred under secular leadership, not under the banner of the Pope. This compromise forced a change in the character of future wars. Leaders had to use more ecumenical discourse to recruit soldiers and justify wars when Catholics and Protestants fought together, resulting in an increasing secularization. Whereas warfare outside the rubric of the Crusades had gone on in parallel with the Crusades from the beginning, secular warfare against the Ottomans increasingly substituted for Crusading.

120. Ibid., p. 10. The internal theological diversity of Protestantism made the concept of Crusading harder, as did the notion of salvation exclusively through faith, which ruled out the idea of receiving spiritual benefits for fighting on behalf of the Pope. Additionally, although the Wars of Religion and the Thirty Years’ War had religious components, they differed from the Crusades in that they mostly occurred as clashes to occupy territory where participants could practice religion, and even Catholic participants did not receive indulgences after the late sixteenth century.
121. Even for Catholics, Martin Luther’s rise likely helped to legitimate criticism of Crusading, especially because his critique of the Catholic Church focused on indulgences. Partner, God of Battles, pp. 188–190; and Riley-Smith, What Were the Crusaders? p. 46.
122. Crusading overlaps at the end of the period with the early modern European military revolution. The increases in army size necessary to succeed during the period further decreased the possibility of Crusading. Geoffrey Parker, The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the
It was only when competing ideas gained force, in combination with material cues for changing behavior, that the Crusading movement lost its hold over Europe. The resiliency of the last vestiges of Crusading shows both how hard it is to shift ideas over time without the “firepower” of a competing idea and, most important, that even when all signs seem to point to extinction, there will often be theological holdouts.123

**Alternative Explanations for Crusading**

The evidence presented above strongly suggests that genuine religious devotion played a significant role in influencing the longevity of the Crusades, but other explanations for the Crusades exist as well. In this section, I show why alternative arguments, which mostly revolve around the impact of a changing strategic environment, economic incentives, or both, cannot account for the institution of Crusading as well as an explanation that incorporates religion.

**Shifts in the Strategic Environment**

One competing interpretation for the longevity of Crusading involves shifts in the geostrategic environment facing the Catholic Church and Christian Europe between the turn of the millennium and the seventeenth century. A realist might argue that threats to European stability from Islamic expansionism and intra-Christian warfare caused the Crusades as successive popes rallied Christian forces to defeat their enemies. When external security threats began to decline, the Crusades faded away.

Despite being parsimonious, this threat-based explanation does not square with the available evidence for the duration of the Crusades. A sharp decline in external threats to Europe accompanied the turn of the millennium: previous invaders such as the Vikings assimilated or retreated, and the Moors on the Iberian Peninsula were not at risk of spreading deeper into the heart of Europe. The destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem ordered by al-Hakim in 1009 represented an exception in what was a generally harmonious relationship between the Muslim rulers of Jerusalem and Christian pilgrims from Europe. Even if threats to Christians abroad mat-

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tered to the population of potential Crusaders, in large part those threats resulted from Muslim control of the Holy Land. The same incentives for a theological shift to allow for the Crusades would have been expected at any point throughout the period. So the threat to Christians abroad cannot explain the timing of the Crusades. Moreover, the period of greatest decline in Crusading occurred as the Ottoman threat to Europe increased.

The way in which threats to Christians abroad influenced papal policy and the elites of Europe also points to the importance of Catholicism as a way of framing their understanding of territory and evaluation of costs and benefits. There were enormous logistical difficulties involved in reaching the Holy Land; easier conquests existed much closer. The Holy Land mattered to Christian Europeans because of its religious significance. The import of the territory itself was endogenous to religious beliefs, showing the plausibility of thinking about religious belief as a relevant factor.

A more plausible material account stresses the demographic and economic growth experienced by Europe in the first century of the new millennium and how this growth created new opportunities for expansion in the form of Crusading. A similar argument could explain the decline of Crusading. As national borders stabilized and generated state interests worth fighting for in their own right, Crusading became less attractive.

Although this account corresponds with how realists understand power in international politics, there is little supporting empirical evidence. The charters and other documents left by Crusaders and their contemporaries are not definitive, but it is reasonable to take economic transactions and statements at face value. For example, the text of the charters for the First Crusade does not provide support for the primacy of the expansionist argument, nor do the transcripts of Urban II’s speech at Clermont or his letters. Rather, they buttress the argument that religious devotion influenced behavior.

The circumstantial evidence that does exist also refutes the expansionist explanation. If the possibility of expansion drove Crusading, one would expect most of the surviving Crusaders to have remained in the Holy Land to reap

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124. This argument also applies to the notion described above that the First Crusade resulted from attempts by Byzantine Emperor Alexius I to rally Christian Europe against Muslim incursions into Byzantium.
125. The knowledge that such activity was now possible could have implicitly or explicitly played into religious dialogues at the time.
the material benefits of their journey. Instead, nearly all of the Crusaders left the Levant as soon as their mission was complete. Although the exact numbers are difficult to know, of the 791 definite or likely First Crusaders studied by Riley-Smith, only 104 had permanently settled in the Levant by 1131. Regardless of the total, only a small number of Crusaders remained in the region in the thirty years following the capture of Jerusalem.127 Throughout the period, nearly all of the Crusaders came to Jerusalem to win remission of their sins and defeat the Saracens, not to colonize. Others came and stayed, but rarely the Crusaders themselves.

Material explanations alone also cannot explain the decline and fall of the Crusading movement. For example, when a third of Europe’s population succumbed to the Black Death, an economic theory might have predicted that the Crusades would cease. Instead, both immediately following the Black Death and during the century of fast economic growth that followed as Europe re-built, Crusading continued at a relatively constant rate. The persistence of the movement for more than 500 years of almost continual defeats, the rise of the nation-state and nationalism, and multiple canonical developments highlight an adaptability and a vigor that purely material explanations would not predict.

One could argue that the decentralization of European society and the slow spread of information about faraway events meant that it took much longer for information about the futility of the Crusades to spread. This would suggest that religious devotion was not responsible for the lengthy inefficiency of the Crusades, but rather limitations in the spread of knowledge. Although communication in the Middle Ages was a far cry from what it is today, contemporary evidence about the spread of information suggests it cannot explain the length of the Crusades. For example, the Second Crusade was initiated in 1145 in response to the fall of Edessa to Zengi’s forces in 1144. Within a year of Edessa’s fall, information spread throughout the relevant European populations, and Pope Eugene III had authorized the Second Crusade. After the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin’s forces in 1187, Pope Gregory VIII almost immediately began planning for the Third Crusade. Richard I took a Crusading vow before the end of 1187, and Philip II took a similar vow in 1188; the Third Crusade began in 1189. So even though information about defeats spread more slowly than it would today, this cannot explain the longevity of Crusading. Moreover, one could argue that the papacy hid evidence of Crusading failures so that the

127. Early Crusader families, such as the Montlherys and the Lusignans, remained and played vital roles throughout the existence of the Crusader Kingdoms. Riley-Smith, The First Crusaders, pp. 19, 190–192.
population did not recognize the difficulties involved. But only by publicizing the failures was the papacy able to raise support for subsequent Crusades, especially in the Levant. The evidence described above shows that the Crusaders were fully aware of the severe material difficulties involved in their endeavors.

THE PURSUIT OF ECONOMIC GAIN

The idea that economics caused the Crusades was popularized in its modern form in the twentieth century. This line of argumentation takes a few different forms. The simple form holds that, for most knights, the desire for plunder drove their decision to become Crusaders. There is some evidence that this sort of “glory” motivated some Crusade leaders such as Robert of Normandy in the First Crusade. A more complex socioeconomic argument involves the intersection of economics, demographics, and family structure. As economic growth in Europe took off in the eleventh century, a demographic boom ensued. Protofeudal economic structures, however, proved unable to absorb the flood of younger nobles. Economic restructuring facilitated growth by consolidating property among older sons, which allowed for the creation of larger and more valuable properties. Participation in a Crusade was one way for younger sons to gain wealth and status.

Neither argument is persuasive. First, Crusading was a hugely expensive undertaking. Most armies had to forage to survive, because their provisions were limited to what they could carry. The extended supply lines of Crusading, especially for expeditions to the Levant, increased the need to replenish supplies along the way. Given that a degree of plunder was inevitable in the Middle Ages, especially when armies fought beyond their home territories, it would be natural to expect plundering during the Crusades. Looting functioned mostly as a means to resupply the army, not as a scheme to leave the Levant with riches.

Similarly, arguments about Venice and Genoa using the institution of Crusading as an excuse to force open trading routes overstate the determinative role of material incentives, making it harder to see the role economics did play. Crusading was already established practice by the time the Italian city-

states had begun expanding. Moreover, their Crusading expeditions, like those of others, involved substantial economic risks with relatively low probabilities of return. The papal naval leagues of the mid-fourteenth century featured contributions from many more actors than just Venice and Genoa, while Venice’s reluctance to participate in some of the anti-Turkish actions of the mid-fifteenth century revolved around the Venetians’ concern that, absent a general crusade, naval actions would fail.

The more complex “safety-valve” argument maintains that demographic pressures drove mostly younger sons to Crusade as a way to achieve economic gain. There is no evidence, however, that a disproportionate number of Crusaders, in comparison with participants in other wars, were younger sons. In fact, Thomas Madden cites data gathered by Riley-Smith concerning the elite social status of most early Crusaders as definitive proof that the safety-valve argument is empirically incorrect. Most Crusaders were lords of their manors, not younger sons. And if most Crusaders not only ended up poorer after the Crusades but knew that the Crusades would impose an economic burden on their families, it seems unlikely that either younger sons or their families would have encouraged participation. As Riley-Smith writes, “Anyone who thought there was much to gain out of the Crusades to the East would have been mad.”

Additionally, the social networks argument explained above provides evidence against a younger sons/demographic pressure explanation. Paying the exorbitant financial cost of Crusading for younger sons was far from an effective way to solve simple inheritance issues. With regard to the safety-valve argument, Riley-Smith writes, “The reality was that far from being an economic safety-valve, Crusading cost the families of volunteers much in fi-

134. Riley-Smith argues that the demographic theory attributed to Duby was in reality a minor footnote in his overall argument about economic development in the region, and that it has received too much attention based on too little hard evidence. Riley-Smith, The First Crusaders, p. 134.
135. Although the younger-son argument has been generally undermined as a broad explanation for motivating individuals to become Crusaders, Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. den Boer argue that it did matter in the specific instance of Portugal. Hudson and den Boer, Bare Branches: The Security Implications of Asia’s Surplus Male Population (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 212–214.
137. Riley-Smith, What Were the Crusaders? p. 73. The demographic safety valve argument also cannot explain the timing of the First Crusade, because the relevant economic pressures existed for a hundred years prior to its beginning.
nancial terms. The only strategy for which there is evidence is one in which the kindred co-operated in damage limitation once a relation had taken the Cross. The costs of war to individuals planning to Crusade were daunting and they rose inexorably as time progressed, which explains, as we have seen, the concern of the Church and secular rulers to provide Crusaders with subsidies.”139

Economic factors almost certainly played a role in creating the conditions that made the Crusades possible. It is difficult to argue, however, that they were the motivation for the Crusades and those who fought them.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates the importance of religion as a driving force behind the Crusades. Despite significant evidence showing the ineffective and costly nature of Crusading, knights over several centuries chose to Crusade. Why? Evidence from the documents left behind by the Crusaders shows that genuine religious devotion truly mattered. “Religiously motivated” is a broad term—not all religiously motivated actors will behave in similar ways. For example, there are differences between religious leaders lobbying the state for action, religious leaders carrying out activities in the name of religion, and a state that operates on religious principles. Similarly, religions that make strong claims about particular state policies may have a different relationship with warfare than religions that draw a clear line between a private domain in which religion exists and a public domain in which specific religious arguments are not permissible.

In the future, scholars may want to explore the potential differences between religious and nonreligious wars by comparing matched historical cases of wars where at least one side had religious motivations with wars where neither side had religious motivations. Such matched cases represent a more controlled environment possible (short of simulation) for examining differences in warfare.

The Crusades case suggests that religion is a potentially important variable that influences international conflict in some situations. Religious motivations may influence when actors go to war, the way they fight, and how wars end. One conclusion of the Crusading case is the importance of new religious ideas in generating shifts in theological systems over time and the strong resistance of ingrained religious ideas to changes in material conditions—even very powerful conditions. The institution of Crusading persisted for several hundred

years despite manifest structural obstacles, including a plague that wiped out a third of Europe’s population, competing imperial structures represented by the Mongols and the Ottomans, and growing nationalism that shifted Europe’s locus of identity away from transnational religious beliefs. Material factors chipped away at the societal support base for the Crusades, but that may have made the remaining supporters even more dogmatic or develop something of a siege mentality in compensation. It was not until the rise of Protestantism that the Crusades ended.

The fact that Crusading theology was never formally repudiated suggests that it is unreasonable to expect that changing socioeconomic conditions can quickly and easily shift societal acceptance of particular theological ideas and that parts of society may take a long time to change. They may fade over time and eventually become irrelevant, but it is a difficult transition and there will be irreconcilable elements of the population for the interim.

This article makes an initial attempt to explain the mechanisms through which religious belief can influence warfare. More study should be undertaken to determine whether certain behaviors such as war termination, initiation, or conduct vary depending on relative usage of religious rhetoric, and in what ways. Further analysis of this subject throughout history may provide valuable insights into current situations. For example, lessons from Crusading might prove useful in assessing the Salafi jihadi movement, a transnational movement with clear religious aspirations. Absent the rise of competing ideas, the Crusades case suggests it will be difficult to eliminate the incentives of some people to join Salafi jihadi groups. Moreover, especially in an era where a small number of people working together can generate mass destruction, as long as hard-core members of Salafi jihadi groups remain, some level of threat will exist. Therefore, it may be useful to think about victory in terms of threat reduction rather than threat elimination.