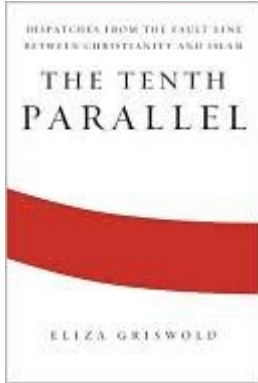


The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line between Christianity and Islam

Eliza Griswold

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Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and it is my pleasure to be hosting the first Public Affairs Program of this season.

To begin the year, I am extremely pleased to welcome Eliza Griswold to the Carnegie Council. As many of you know, over the years the Carnegie Council has hosted a number of programs on religion and politics. Eliza's discussion, based on her book, *The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Front Line between Christianity and Islam*, will be an interesting addition to this series, especially for those who are trying to make better sense of the relationship between the rise of Christianity and the swelling of Islamic populations in Africa and in Asia.

In *The Tenth Parallel*, our speaker, who is an award-winning investigative journalist, explores what happens when Christianity and Islam meet, collide, and clash along an invisible faith-based fault line dating back centuries. This tenth parallel is a line of latitude that serves as both a geographic and ideological divide.

In turning her eye towards this invisible boundary, Eliza records how each religion has been shaped over time. She writes that along this line of latitude 700 miles north of the equator that spans two continents, is where more than 60 percent of the world's 2 billion Christians live together with half the world's 1.3 billion Muslim population. It is along this horizontal band that circles the Earth where populations are increasing faster than the rest of the world, nationalism is growing, and religion is expanding.

Our speaker spent the better part of the past seven years witnessing just how intently the war between Islam and Christianity is being waged in African countries such as Nigeria, the Sudan, Somalia, and in Asian countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia; all countries whose histories conjure up dramatic images of clashing civilizations and competing fundamentalism.

In war-torn cities, drought-ravaged fields, and near-empty deserts, Eliza gathered unforgettable stories which for the most part were taken from religious leaders who explained to her how these two religions, Christianity and Islam, came to exist in countries where today missionaries and aid workers, dysfunctional governments, well-armed militias, and profiteers live side by side.

As these disparate people battle for land, food, oil, water, and the right to worship in the manner they choose, Eliza illustrates how the role of limited resources and climate change, cultural identity, demographic trends, and religious revivals all have combined to shape the present-day conflicts that in turn are fostering so much religious tension.

In exploring the narrative, our guest reveals that the disturbances that we so often hear about are in reality clashes that are more complex than just those between religions. She writes that the real challenges lie in understanding that today's conflicts are those within Christianity and inside Islam. In the end, these disturbances give rise to new divisions within the religions themselves.

Accordingly, as these clashes become crashes, what happens on the tenth parallel will be far more important in shaping the world's religions and aggravating the world's fault lines in the years ahead. To illuminate these underlying tensions, please join me in welcoming Eliza Griswold.

Remarks

ELIZA GRISWOLD: What a terrific introduction. I really don't have to give the talk now.

I can't think of anywhere I would rather be. Thank you so much for having me.

My interest in this work has very much been the question of ethics in our foreign policy, and that is certainly where I began doing this reporting. I began this book in the fall of 2003 when I went with [Franklin Graham](#), [Billy Graham's](#) son, to Sudan.

Franklin Graham leads a half-billion-dollar evangelical empire, and he had been working for 20 years in Sudan, but south of the tenth parallel, because the British divided Sudan on the tenth parallel in 1904. They had faced a long history of Islamic rebellion in the north, and in order to basically quell the population, they established a fault line 700 miles north of the equator, which is the tenth parallel, making it illegal for Christian missionaries to work among Muslims to the north of that line, and eventually making it illegal for Muslim traders to work to the south of that line. The result of this fault line is more than 40 years of civil war and the death of over 2 million people.

We will be hearing more about Sudan in the news because on January 9, 2011, the south has the right, for the first time in history, to vote for its own independence. It's part of a [peace deal](#) the United States brokered in 2005. Whether or not south Sudan will have the right to vote for its own independence and what that independence could mean to Africa will be the determining factor in the next decade of what we see in terms of conflict in Africa.

Sudan is, at 1 million square miles, Africa's largest country. When I traveled there with Franklin Graham, he was going to meet for the first time in history a man he considers akin to the devil, a man he has called just as evil as [Saddam Hussein](#), if not more so. This is Sudan's current president, President [Bashir](#), who is the only president who stands indicted of war crimes by the International Criminal Court and is still a standing president.

This is the guy we're familiar with in terms of Darfur, yet there's a much longer history of conflict in Sudan which dates back before President Bashir's

presence in office.

But he was a military general who staged a coup in 1989, established himself as the leader of Sudan, and declared the modern world's largest jihad against Christians and Muslims alike in his own country.

This is where Franklin Graham forged a lot of his ideas about contemporary Islam as a threat. These are the ideas that he brought back as a real power broker within the evangelical community and within the foreign policy community of the United States that have had a major role in forging our foreign policy in the region.

Once again, this is no new relationship. This dates to the beginning of the 20th century and the British throwing up their hands and saying, "How are we going to govern this huge country, and why do they hate us?" Some of those questions we are familiar with.

I am going to start by reading something I have not read in public before, which is always fun for everyone involved, and that's the beginning of this 2003 trip.

The casualty ward of Khartoum's Ahmed Gasim Children's Hospital was strung with fake red flowers for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. It steamed with the press of bodies and the glare of TV lights. The Reverend Franklin Graham murmured a prayer over four-month-old Shirain, who was dying of a congenital heart defect. The child was smaller than his outstretched hand, and she lay swaddled and inert on a pus-stained cot. Her gray eyelids, like moth wings, stayed closed and still as flashbulbs flooded the cot she shared with her mother Nada, a woman of 28. Graham, in a blue wool blazer and cowboy boots, was sweating.

In December 2003, Franklin Graham was already one of America's most powerful evangelical leaders. At 57, he was also the eldest son of Billy Graham. Known as the personal pastor to [George W. Bush](#), Graham was poised to inherit his father's \$200 million-a-year organization, the [Billy Graham Evangelistic Association](#), and he already ran one of his own, [Samaritan's Purse](#), a \$175-million a year worldwide evangelical Christian relief and development organization founded in 1970.

For more than two decades, Franklin Graham had provided relief and medical aid in southern Sudan, but this was his first trip to the northern capital of Khartoum. Graham, a bush pilot who had flown his own Gulfstream to Sudan, was going to meet his enemy, President Bashir, a man he had called just as evil as Saddam Hussein.

In the late fall of 2003, that simile had particular weight, since America was soon to invade Hussein's Iraq and had already deposed the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, a former general, who had seized power in a 1989 military coup and then declared jihad against the south, had already begun to wage attacks against the [Fur](#) people to the west in the formerly independent kingdom known as Darfur. But in Khartoum, word of the unfolding genocide was little more than whispered.

Yet Graham had come to Khartoum at Bashir's invitation. The Sudanese regime was trying to curry favor with Washington and thus avoid being the next Muslim country America attacked. Bashir was also hoping to persuade the United States to lift the economic sanctions that had been put in place in 1998 after al Qaeda operatives blew up American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on orders from [Osama bin Laden](#), whom Sudan had been sheltering since 1991.

Graham had his own reasons for coming to Khartoum, and some of them lay in the ward of this hospital. With its coppery sting of blood and bleach, the air made Graham's eyes water. "There is an opening in her heart," Nada said, peering wearily at her daughter. The strain of staying alive had wizened the baby's features. Although the operation that could save her life was a simple one, it was not available in Sudan. Shirain would live for one more month, maybe two, the hospital's director, Dr. Monam [phonetic], told us.

He followed Graham's entourage around the ward as they placed taped-up Nike and Payless Shoe Source boxes on each of the 15 cots. The boxes were part of [Operation Christmas Child](#), one of Graham's efforts at worldwide evangelization. People in America and Britain pack the boxes with toothbrushes, socks, toys, and sometimes Bibles, and place handwritten letters inside.

I read one from a ten-year-old in Brooklyn: "I hope you like your gifts in the shoebox. You can think of the gifts as a blessing from Jesus Christ. Do you know Jesus Christ as your lord and savior? I hope we are both similar in many ways."

In 2003 Operation Christmas Child delivered 6 million gift-packed shoeboxes around the world, 60,000 of which arrived in Khartoum. Graham placed a box on Nada and Shirain's cot, along with a pamphlet called "The Greatest Gift of All."

He moved on to another patient, a three-year-old boy named Osama, as Nada rifled through her box, pulling out a roll of pink chewing gum called Bubble Tape, a stuffed rabbit, and a book of Bible stories. She stroked the bunny distractedly and opened the pamphlet, which read, "Dear God, I know I'm a sinner. I made the wrong choices and did bad things. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I know your Son Jesus died for my sins, and I believe you raised Him from the dead. I want Jesus to be my lord."

Squatting next to the bed, I asked Nada what the book was about. "Jesus," she said. "This book talks about Jesus and what your soul is."

The patients and the parents in the hospital were Muslims, and for Graham, reaching them with the gospel's good news was imperative. Whether they chose to accept the invitation was up to them.

This is the beginning of my trip with Graham. When he did meet with President Bashir later in the trip, I went along. The two men very quickly tried to convert each other to their respective faith, which one might imagine didn't go terribly well. From that point, many of us, besides the two men, were ushered out into the driveway, and the two men continued their conversation.

Franklin told me later that he remembered he had something in his blazer pocket that he wanted to give to Bashir. What that was was a George W. Bush 2004 reelection pin. So he reached into his pocket and he handed it to Bashir and said, "Mr. President, I understand you'll be speaking with my president later on today. Why don't you tell him you're his first voter here in the Sudan?"

What is the importance of that? That statement very clearly says, "I'm close with this president, I'm close with President Bush. Watch your step here and listen to what I say."

What he wanted was the right to evangelize, to preach to Muslims in the north about Jesus Christ, and again, very clearly, to let people make their own choice after hearing that message. This was not an act of coercion, it was an act of conversion.

That's what Graham was up to. I found this fascinating, and I thought, you know what? We don't see very much in this country of how religion actually plays out as a force in people's lives. I thought what I would do is travel along this line 700 miles north of the equator, the tenth parallel, and examine

a handful of western evangelical leaders and see how they confronted Islam in the world.

Very quickly, I realized that was not the way to do it. The true story lay between Africans and Africans, Asians and Asians, not with a handful of white people. That was not the story. And why?

As I began to travel along this fault line, I learned the stunning fact to me that four out of the five of the world's Muslims live outside of the Middle East. They are not Arabs. They are Africans and they are Asians, and they live in these countries and they live also in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country, with a population of 240 million people, 90 percent of whom are Muslim.

Once I started to see how very real this fault line was—and in Africa geographically it ends where it does because it is dry north Africa. Islam got as far south at the hands of traders and missionaries as it did through the 19th century until it reached the tenth parallel, where Islam largely stopped.

Why? Because this is where dry land became wet land, and where the wet land began, the jungle began, and where jungle began, [tsetse flies](#) began. Tsetse flies to this day begin along the tenth parallel and carry sleeping sickness. The horses and camels whom the missionaries and traders were riding—their cars, essentially—were killed off by this illness, and Islam could go no further south.

What happened with European colonialization is that tons of missionaries came along with colonial efforts. Many had different agendas. Some just wanted to spread the faith, some wanted to do good work, some expressly wanted to stop Islam from winning Africa.

In Africa many set up mission stations along the tenth parallel expressly to stop the crescent faith from winning Africa. A lot of the language that we see coming out of places like the Islamic center at Ground Zero—a lot of this kind of "Islam is the enemy, we'd better watch for it"—this is a century old at least. This is not a new conversation, we've just forgotten a lot of it. A lot of my job is to remind us of these patterns and remind us of the very practical fallout to these patterns in the lives of people who live along this fault line.

In Asia the pattern is largely the same because the trade winds drop along this line. This is the place where two kinds of wind meet because dry air and wet air move and collide there. Christian and Muslim traders who sailed to South East Asia landed on the same beaches and ports, vying for the same spices and the same crops. Today it's chocolate. In the 16th century it was cloves. Basically, this is how faith and trade, faith and commerce, come together; and before them, of course, Hindu and Buddhist traders and missionaries did the same things on the same islands.

Certainly one of the most—and the introduction alluded to this—the largest take-away for me of this experience is not that Islam and Christianity are in some monolithic clash, although there are certainly problematic and radical elements trying to promote that. The most overlooked religious clash is the confrontation inside of religions. It's the wrestling between Christians and Christians, Muslims and Muslims, over who has the right to speak for God and why. That is certainly what I saw as I did this traveling.

That said, this fault line is quite real. Again, in the introduction there was a quick allusion to the fact that never did I see a religious conflict that didn't have a secular or worldly trigger, whether that trigger was land, water, a local election, oil, or also, again, chocolate.

In Sulawesi, on an island in eastern Indonesia, when the price of worldwide chocolate spiked, so did violence between Christians and Muslims, because the land became much more valuable.

In Indonesia alone we're dealing with more than two thousand islands that make up this country. Forgive me because I am speaking in massive generalizations, but largely what happened in the East is that Islam arrived first and set itself up very prominently along the coasts. Why not? Trade routes, people are fishing, that's their primary protein, they're talking to one another.

When colonial efforts really began in earnest, particularly under the Dutch in South East Asia—and we're talking 16th century here—the missionaries saw that Islam had won the coasts. What they did is they traveled inland. They traveled up rivers and into jungles, thinking, okay, the inland people are not Muslims. Why? Well, primarily because their protein couldn't be fish. They didn't live near the ocean. Their protein had to be pork. They ate pigs and wild boar because that's what they had as meat.

The Dutch thought, this is convenient, because these guys can't be good Muslims. Eating pork is *haram*. Let's make them Christians. Again this is a generalization, but if you look at the eastern part of the archipelago of Indonesia, in particular, you can see a bull's-eye pattern, that the Christians tend to live inland away from the coasts and Islam tends to ring the coasts.

These are the patterns I knew very little about before I started doing this traveling. What I would do over these seven years is I would go learn something, and then I would think, well, that can't possibly be true. It can't be true that a German missionary named Karl Kumm wanted to set up 20,000 mission stations on this fault line. That's what the people are telling me in this town where they see themselves at war with Islam, that they're just carrying on the work on this 19th century missionary.

Then I would come back. I was at Harvard for a little while. I would dig into the archives. There was Sudan United Mission, explicitly set up along the tenth parallel to stop this rival faith.

This book has been a layered process and I did not start with an overarching thesis. Conclusions are drawn out from my own experiences. I just started wanting to learn what was happening when these two religions met across cultures and across continents.

I am going to read you a tiny bit more from two sections. I was in Sudan with Franklin Graham in 2003. I returned five years later in 2008, explicitly to the tenth parallel. Again, this is the line the Brits split Sudan on, and lo and behold, it is one of the most violent today. It is where two people meet because, of course, the line was pretty arbitrary. But they didn't just throw it onto the map. There were these geographic realities already. Islam had largely stopped there. They had met the French in a battle along this line. So they just thought, okay, we're going to do this.

I am going to read to you about a man who lives on this line. He is a chief, and he is a subchief of the largest population of southern Sudanese called the [Ngok Dinka](#). Three weeks after I met with him on Easter Sunday in 2008, his entire village was wiped out. A hundred thousand people were displaced.

He was screaming, screaming, screaming for the international community to come in and do something. There is an armed blue-helmet UN presence there. As is sometimes the case, the blue helmets withdrew into a base when violence began. The man whom you are about to meet lost everything he had.

He is still alive, and he has returned to this fault line. We're looking in January at the exact same thing happening in the exact same way. I will read you a little bit about him.

The chief was spending Easter Sunday in his hut, which smelled of stale smoke from a cooking fire and of something more glandular: panic. When the visitor from Washington ducked inside, the chief, a man in his mid-50s named Nyol Paduot, rose stiff-kneed from a white plastic lawn chair. He had spent several days keeping watch against an approaching dust cloud kicked up by horsemen and

jeeps. It would mean his village of Todaj, teetering on the fraught and murky border between northern and southern Sudan, was under attack again. He was grouchy and unkempt, his eyes pouched, his salt-and-pepper beard scruffy, his waxy green and yellow shirt stained with the tide lines of dried sweat.

He glowered at the American visitor, [Roger Winter](#), whose bare legs poked out from khaki shorts. One leg bore the scar of a snake bite he had gotten not far away while helping to broker a peace on behalf of the United States. The 2005 deal was supposed to end nearly 40 years of intermittent civil war between northern and southern Sudan, which had left 2 million people dead.

In some places the peace agreement had staunched the bloodshed, allowing the south to form a nascent government that described itself as Christian-led. Under the terms of the deal, the north was supposed to make it attractive for the south to remain part of a unified Sudan by giving it a voice in the national government and a fair share of the oil revenues. But the north ignored most of the terms. The peace deal proved to mean nothing here on the boundary between the two Sudans, which jigs and jags like an EKG reading along the straight, flat latitude of the tenth parallel.

The tenth parallel is the horizontal band that rings the earth 700 miles north of the equator. If Africa is shaped like a rumpled sock, with South Africa at the toe and Somalia at the heel, then the tenth parallel runs across the ankle. Across the tenth parallel in Sudan and in most of inland Africa, two worlds collide. The mostly Arab Muslim north meets a black African south inhabited by Christians and those who follow indigenous religions, which include those who venerate ancestors and the spirits of animals, land, and sky.

Today the two northern and south entities meet in Todaj, which marks the divide where these two rival world views, their dysfunctional governments and well-armed militaries vie inch by inch by land.

The village belonged to the south's largest ethnic group, the Ngok Dinka, but in 2008 when Roger Winter paid Nyol Paduot a visit, the north was threatening to send its soldiers and Arab militias to attack the village and lay claim to the underground river of light, sweet crude oil running beneath the chief's feet.

That is Chief Paduot. He is somebody I think about quite frequently. The way in which that story unfolds in the text is indicative of how the larger book works, which is really people's stories as they themselves told their stories to me.

If I see my role as anything, it's as a translator of sorts. One thing I found, becoming a reporter shortly before September 11, is I would go—I was already reporting on Islam in 2000—and I would go to Afghanistan and Iraq, and I would come back with stories. My editors in my wonderful and secular publications would say, "Come on, doesn't this all boil down to the haves and have-nots, some aspect of political economy? What does religion really have to do with it?"

And yet when I traveled along this fault line to report back honestly and accurately what people themselves told me about their experience of violent clash, religion had everything to do with it.

Somehow we need to take more account of what people themselves who live their faith as the patterning force of their lives, both Christians and Muslims—and we're talking about the vast majority of populations at this point—how that truly factors into our worldview, because the idea of a world developing towards secularism is over. If the world is developing in any direction, it is developing toward a more spiritual reality. That is largely because what is happening inside both Islam and Christianity at this moment are these massive revivals. We hear it, right?

What is this about? Well, in both cases this is about people finding a personal relationship with the Divine, and that relationship then becomes unmediated by any kind of priest or imam. This is about my relationship with my God.

Where that can become dangerous is when people feel they have absolute accurate knowledge of God's will given to them through the literal word of their text, and that text says everybody who is not you is going to hell. They are sinners at best, they are your enemy at worst.

I am going to end with a brief moment of reading about one of these people. To return to this point of the clash within, this is a man I met and traveled with in Indonesia.

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country and there is a hot battle going on inside the country. People say to me, "Well, is Islam compatible with democracy?" All one needs to do is look at Indonesia. It is the world's largest Muslim democracy, and it's functioning.

Does that mean there's not violence within it? Does that mean different kinds of Muslims aren't vying for their control over who speaks for God? Very much no, and some of those people are very, very violent, and here is one of them.

This chapter is called "Beyond Jihad" because the terms we see this clash through—the rest of the world's—jihad is so familiar, it's thousands of years old, 1,500 years old for many of these people. Christianity and Islam have met in Africa since 615 A.D., since the prophet Mohammed began preaching, got kicked out of Mecca by his own people, and sent his own followers to the court of a Christian king in Ethiopia for safekeeping. These religions in Africa know each other, and in Asia, know each other very well.

Jihad—we're late to the game with this term. This is a term that is very familiar and very fraught in many places, and Indonesia is one of them.

A Muzak rendition of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* echoed through the Jakarta Airport's domestic terminal shortly after dawn on May 9, 2006. A 40-year-old man wearing knockoff Ray-Ban Wayfarers and an Al Jazeera baseball cap shuffled along with a large cardboard box poked with holes tucked under his arm. A minor celebrity within the world of international jihad, Farihin Ibnu Ahmad, a.k.a. "Yasir," was barely known outside of it. He was renowned for his violent pedigree, although few people other than militants would have recognized his broad hangdog face.

He sidled up to a plainclothes security officer and thrust the box toward him. "Will the X-ray machine kill them?" he asked. The officer pulled back one of the box's dog-eared corners to reveal a pair of rabbits, mottled black and white, noses twitching wildly at the unfamiliar smells of stale coffee and perfume.

Ibnu Ahmad—Ibnu in Indonesian, like bin in Arabic, means 'son of'—wanted to know if he should check the rabbits or if he could carry them onto the plane. The officer glanced up from the rabbits to Ibnu Ahmad's face, half hidden beneath the baseball cap. Though I was there to meet Ibnu Ahmad, I scooted furtively to the other side of the corridor, certain he was about to be arrested.

The rabbits should have been the least of the security officer's concerns. Ibnu Ahmad was a killer and a member of [Jemaah Islamiya](#), a lethal group of South East Asian militants most notorious for the [2002 Bali bombings](#) which left 202 people dead. The militants' ties to al Qaeda were precisely through men like Ibnu Ahmad.

Thank you.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: *The New York Times' Sunday Book Review's* rave [review](#) of your book cited as one of its great values the fact—as you've been pointing out in the last minute here—that whereas a lot of Americans think of the Middle East as the home of Muslims, your book talks about Malaysia, Indonesia, countries like that, where actually there are more Muslims than there are in the Middle East.

The question I wanted to ask you was, you have managed to link them by drawing the tenth parallel. Do these people themselves relate to each other?

In other words, when you're in Indonesia and talking to Muslims there, do they feel any kinship with Muslims in the Middle East?

ELIZA GRISWOLD: They largely feel lesser. This is one of the things that our intelligence establishment has tried to play up. When Ibnu Ahmad, this Indonesian man, went and trained in al Qaeda's camps in Pakistan, he was treated quite poorly. Why? Because he's not Arab. There's a question of ethnicity within many of these relationships, certainly within the militants, and we as the United States have tried to exploit the divisions between them. The thought process is, Wait, if these guys treat each other badly, then maybe we can show them, "Hey, Ibnu Ahmad, they don't treat you like an equal. Get out of al Qaeda."

It's curious how it plays out on the ground. I've never seen that disillusionment work so powerfully that people disown the Arab world, because the Arabian Peninsula is the home of Islam and is seen by many as having a purer form of Islam.

This is one of the struggles within the Muslim world that I find most interesting and powerful. Indonesia is such a fast-growing country and so huge in terms of its more liberal elements. There's an Indonesian scholar in this country named [Abdullah Ahmed an Na'im](#), who's a professor at Emory, and he says, "Islam is going in a more moderate direction. How do I know that? Look at Indonesia." That's because there's such a breadth of belief in Indonesia itself in comparison to the Arabian Peninsula, where we don't see that.

That's an open question, which way that tug is going, but if anything, there's a bit of a grudge, and certainly this is true. The vast majority of Africa's 400 million Muslims are [Sufis](#). There is certainly more of a grudge between them and this more Arabian school of Islam over what it means to be a true believer. That is one of those clashes within.

The Sufis say, "We sing and we dance. You're going to tell me I'm not a true believer? I've been a Muslim as long as you have." And yet there is definitely a more conservative school that says, "Yes, that's African belief, that's not pure Islam."

That is one of those fights between more liberal people and more conservative ones over who speaks for God, who is a true believer, and who is going to control the future.

QUESTION: How was the 2005 agreement in the Sudan brokered? Do you view it as a positive thing going forward, or does it really formalize the divisions between the north and the south?

ELIZA GRISWOLD: Basically, the United States strong-armed the north and south to sit down together at the table. This incredible man who has been an advocate for the south for more than two decades, Roger Winter, the man in the khaki shorts—he got that snake bite on his leg when he was running at something like 4:00 in the morning between two factions who were trying to work out the terms of a peace, and a snake bit him in the grass as he ran with these papers, with the peace deal in his hands.

American NGOs, American faith-based NGOs, groups like Franklin Graham's, were very influential in having people have essentially a buy-in, have an interest in what it would mean to establish this peace.

Whether the peace has been successful or not depends on whom you ask. I was interested to see in a Nick Kristof column last week, that he said "a largely successful peace." That is certainly true if you look at the fact that the war between north and south largely stopped after this 2005 deal. If you ask the people who live along the tenth parallel, they've seen no difference.

In fact the current president of Sudan, Bashir, was a general on the tenth parallel. It was here that he started using the [Janjaweed](#), these Arab militias, on horseback in Darfur. The whole idea came from this tenth parallel region. They've been riding through villages like Todaj for more than two decades.

The short answer is, "It depends on 'where,'" to see if this 2005 peace deal was successful. That's the single most useful sentence for me on parsing war in Sudan, which is the most complicated I have ever dealt with. That's the best way to understand wars, whether they're Darfur, whether they're north-south—the Sudanese government fights against its own people on the eastern border, the Beja.

They're at war everywhere. Why? Because it's a central Khartoum-based cabal basically at war with its own peripheries. Whether those peripheries are Christian, Muslim, they don't care. They are afraid of a challenge of power.

There's a fight right now within the U.S. policy camp. There are a couple of camps. One, [Susan Rice](#) says, "Do not negotiate with Khartoum. This northern regime, Bashir's regime, is totally illegitimate; stay away from them." Then there is [Scott Gration](#), who is currently leading the U.S. effort who says we have to deal with Khartoum.

What is the right thing to do? That is a question I am not sure I can answer.

That was a long answer to your question. It is so complicated. I do not think that it's any good for the U.S. interest to be providing carrots to Khartoum, and say we'll lift sanctions, you guys will be okay, you can stay on in power. We've never had any indication from Khartoum that they've honored any agreement we've made with them.

I am very influenced by traveling with men like Roger Winter among these minority populations who have lost so much. That's kind of where I come out on it today. Thank you.

QUESTION: Eliza, could you go into a little more detail about the [referendum](#) coming up early next year? I assume that the great fear is that they will vote for independence but the north will not let them be independent because of oil and some of the other things that are going on in the south.

ELIZA GRISWOLD: On January 9, as part of this 2005 deal, Bashir signed a document saying that in January of 2011 the south, which sees itself as very independent, has its own quasi-government—it's not very functional but it has its own government—the south will have the right to vote whether they want to stay part of Sudan, with its rapacious government. For the first time in history and with 40 years of war between them, the south will have a right to be independent.

The concerns on the U.S. front from our policy people are more than that the north won't let the south go. The other primary concern is that the south will be a failed state and that we will basically have another Congo times ten on our hands, that we will be looking at Africa's next world war. That's our largest concern.

QUESTION: I spent a good deal of time in the Sudan in the 1960s and 1970s. We were going to put a battery plant in there. I lived in Indonesia and Singapore at that time. We didn't put it in because we sensed that the population was growing like crazy and that the Darfur people would move east, and what happened happened, and so we never went ahead with it.

The population then was 8 million. It is now 36 million. Don't you think this is a pretty big factor in the upheaval in this place?

ELIZA GRISWOLD: Absolutely.

QUESTIONER: I do. I think it's the major factor in all the instability there.

ELIZA GRISWOLD: The reason that these religions are growing so fast is driven by demographics. Between the equator and the tenth parallel is the place where the populations are growing faster than anywhere else on the planet.

There are two reasons we see numbers of believers spike. One is simply birth rates, another is conversion.

One of the things, if you talk to Christians and Muslims who live along this fault line—Muslims will say quite openly, "Listen, I have four wives, I have 16 children. When the next election comes here, we're winning. Look who I've been able to make. How many Christians are there? Who cares? They have one wife."

There is a man in the book named Abdullah Abdullah who is a human rights lawyer, whom I absolutely love, who took me into a field where there had been a very bloody election. I had a microphone because I was trying to tape him. He took the microphone and became [Phil Donahue](#). There were thousands of them, and he was explaining this, "Look at us."

The conservative Christians in this country frequently use this idea that Islam is out to dominate us through numbers. It's a cuckoo argument, and yet here are the demographics on the ground. There is no question population growth has a huge factor.

QUESTION: I am trying to understand all the dynamics, like I'm from Mars and looking at all these crazy fights. Do you think that the demographics lead to a dysfunction? So many children, so hard to manage, religion becomes an outlet.

I'm trying to look at what's the underlying dynamic for this dysfunction. How do we move to a more peaceful planet? Is it prosperity? What are the underpinnings?

ELIZA GRISWOLD: If there were only one dynamic, we would be in a much better situation. Part of the reality that I didn't touch on at all today is that these are failed states. Colonial borders drawn arbitrarily on maps between Nigeria and its neighbors never function as states anyway.

What I've seen is that the world is really breaking down on tribal lines, and the greatest of those tribes is religion, because it gives a local significance and a global significance.

All of these factors come to bear. Your state fails, your government is out to get you. In Nigeria you can't even get electricity, let alone schooling, from your government. Well, who can get you electricity? The local imam can get you electricity on your street, and you're safe from the fact that Christians keep ripping out the copper wiring.

This identity comes to bear in every local reality and then the larger global one. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country. One in seven Africans lives in Nigeria, 140 million people—40 million Christians, 40 million Muslims—we don't really know how many. Why? Because the census can't ask questions about religion. It's too violent. Within the Muslim community there is very much the feeling of the West had its chance. The Christian West had its chance. It sowed the seeds of this democracy which totally failed us. It's a corrupt sham out to take our oil from us. What can answer our questions? Islam can. Sharia can. Islamic law can answer our questions.

That's poverty and population growth. We didn't even get to the fact that this is one of the most environmentally sensitive bands in the world, because this is where this dry/wet meets. The storms that are generated in this zone spin westward. They spin off the west coast of Africa at Cape Verde. They cross the Atlantic Ocean, and if they're really, really strong, they strike our east coast as hurricanes.

There isn't a single factor. I would say that education matters. Twenty-three million Muslim kids in Nigeria alone have absolutely no schooling. If there is schooling at all, they work as beggars for this local teacher who is called an *almajiri* teacher. It's kind of like a madrasa. So education, education, education, that's where I would begin.

The other thing that I've seen is successful is when you bring a third element into a conversation. There's a pastor and imam in northern Nigeria. The pastor has one arm because the imam's boys lopped his arm off in fighting about 15 years ago. The men now work together. They are self-avowed fundamentalists. Each believes the other is going to hell, no questions asked. They are peacefully holding together a town called Kaduna, which means crocodile.

One of the ways they do this is that they supply green stoves to a local group of women, Muslim and Christian alike. When you bring in a secular element and it's about mutual survival, I've seen communities start to rebuild each other very quickly.

QUESTION: I had the opportunity, which I'm very grateful for, of having met [John Garang](#), who was a powerful personality and revered, as you know, in southern Sudan, and who sadly was killed in a plane crash a few days before this agreement was signed.

I can't ask you what would have happened if he were alive, obviously, but is his legacy used? Is his memory called upon? Tell me, does he still play a role in what's going on in the south?

ELIZA GRISWOLD: John Garang would have been the president of south Sudan now, an incredibly charismatic figure who had led the south in this civil war against the north.

Curiously enough—I hope this isn't too much of a diversion—the way in which Garang held his people together is he was a very strong evangelical Christian. He believed—this is historical truth—that Christianity had been in Sudan since around 37 AD, four years after the death of Jesus Christ, because this is when, in the Book of Acts, the apostle Philip has a moment with a Sudanese eunuch.

I'm going to keep this short. There's a eunuch. He's in Jerusalem. He's reading aloud, as all reading was done at the time, and he is reading the Old Testament. Philip hears him and says, "Do you know what you're reading?" Anyway, the eunuch ends up converting and being baptized in a roadside

river. The Sudanese story has it that eunuch then goes back to Sudan and brings Christianity there.

Whether Christianity came in 37 AD or within 50 years after that, there's no question that Christianity has been in Africa and in Sudan for that long. That is the major rallying point and a spine of shared identity for the southern Sudanese to this day.

Numerically, there are a ton of Christians. There are also a ton of indigenous believers. The whole south is not entirely Christian, which we sometimes hear. "Oh, Christian south, Muslim north." Not really. The south is a lot of things.

Garang used this story as a way to keep his people together. In terms of practicalities, his legend—I have met with his widow, who is an incredible figure. He was very ethically clean. Too bad he's gone. [Salva Kiir](#), who was his number two, is now the president, and is not as clean, and is therefore hard to get behind in the same way.

So that's the long answer—I'm sorry—on John Garang.

QUESTION: I have a question with regard to the interfaith dialogue. Here at the UN we have hosted quite a number of interfaith activities with the leadership of the Philippine ambassador who passed the resolution on interfaith.

But it has never been at the UN a very strong resolution. There are activities, meetings, here and there, but it has never been a top priority. Of course, at the UN we have discussions on the [Millennium Development Goals](#), the advancement of women, children of armed conflict, and so on, so it has never been our priority.

In your view, do you think interfaith dialogue is effective? And how do you think this can be done more, in a stronger way?

ELIZA GRISWOLD: I am going to say something somewhat controversial, but as I grew up as the child of a priest who was engaged in a lot of interfaith dialogue, I feel informed in saying this.

Interfaith dialogue is largely a waste of time because it's not substantive. It's, "I believe that." "You do? I believe that." End of conversation.

What works is when you bring in a third element. You bring in a local school, a playground, a water project, something that people have to work together on in practical ways in order for their community to benefit.

You and I are looking at each other like this. If we stand next to each other and look at the thing in front of us and learn how to talk about that thing, that is a method that I have actually seen practically work in post-conflict situations.

At the same time, in most of these places, certainly along the tenth parallel, political leaders are so corrupt, and they have no respect among local people. A lot of them we like because we can control them or we can talk to them.

Religious leaders are the people to watch and to reach out to.

Again, it is one of those kind of paradoxical answers. The UN in the Muslim world is a joke largely. It's like, "Oh, yeah, go with your secular values, you Christian organization." And certainly among Christian conservatives, the UN is like the devil. It's a hard one. But I would say that's the most complete answer I could give.

QUESTION: How does an African Muslim feel about all the murdering of Muslims in the Middle East?

ELIZA GRISWOLD: In terms of what murdering?

QUESTIONER: Like in Iraq when they're blowing up the people in the squares. How do they feel about all of that?

ELIZA GRISWOLD: Well, it depends if you're asking a Muslim, a Shia, or a Sunni African, or a Sufi, because they're going to have a relationship with whoever is getting killed vis-à-vis that larger global connection. Does that make sense?

So if you ask a Nigerian Shia, which is one of the kookiest groups I've ever seen—these guys have just adopted the Shia basically identity. Some have studied in Iran. They are basically reformers. They very much feel aligned with Iran. They are having a violent confrontation with their own Sunni neighbors over ideology that has been imported.

When the Danish cartoon riots happened, more people were killed in Nigeria than any other country. These are kinds of divisions that we need to watch more closely.

QUESTION: Could I fairly say, and can you corroborate this, do you think it's imploding? Do I get a sense that a civil war is going to break out among these factions and then we'll all be okay afterwards? (Laughter) What's your impression on that?

ELIZA GRISWOLD: I would be more concerned about the social civil war that's going on inside American Christianity, simply because we're paying no attention. Since when did conservatives get the right to speak for God? That's a fight we've got to start. If I've seen another hopeful sign, it is that from Indonesia—and Indonesia did it earlier than we did—moderates became tired of letting radicals own the conversation.

What we see is two extremely vocal radical sides shaping this divide. We have cuckoos trying to burn the Koran, we have Osama bin Laden, and what do we see of the Muslim world? We see Osama bin Laden. What do most of the world's Muslims see of the West? They see this cuckoo Koran burner, they see missionaries, soldiers, and [Britney Spears](#). And that's who they think we are.

Do I think that is leading to a huge civil war? No. Do I think it's time that moderates speak up and say, "Excuse me, I'm not Britney Spears"? Very much so.

JOANNE MYERS: Thank you very much.

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