

## **IDL 104: Major Issues in International Conflict Management Sample Essay**

**Many people believe that intrastate civil wars constitute a matter of international security although, by definition, a civil war is fought between warring factions within a state. Do you agree or disagree that civil wars are a matter of international security? Be sure to support your position with relevant information from the course readings and lectures.**

The concept of a civil war is inherently domestic. Webster's dictionary defines a 'civil war' as 'a war between opposing groups of citizens of the same country.' [1] However, during the past ten years, there have been a number of internal conflicts in which the international community has intervened and many of these interventions have prominently featured reasons of international security among the laundry list of reasons for intervention. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate that civil wars, in general, have the potential to affect the security of separate states and, therefore, should be addressed as a matter of international security. This is primarily due to the common existence of so-called 'spill-over' effects, connections to terrorism and drug trade in failed states, and refugee side effects present in nominally internal conflicts.

Perhaps the most pressing demonstration of the international dimension of civil war is the existence of 'spill-over' effects. This term describes the phenomenon that civil wars are rarely limited to the territory in which they take place due to rebels requiring sanctuary, markets for illicit goods, as well as the tendency of states to use neighboring civil wars as proxies for actual inter-state conflicts.

A second reason for the international character of civil conflicts is the correlation between failed states and international ills such as terrorism and drug trafficking. Perhaps the most obvious example spawns from the civil war in Afghanistan during the 1990's. During this period, Al Qaeda was provided with a sanctuary to organize attacks and train, culminating in the September 11 attacks on New York. At the same time, heroin sales were used to finance the war, flooding the international market with illicit drugs.

A final basis for civil conflicts to be included in the umbrella of international security is due to the social and financial burdens imposed upon the international community by refugees. Currently, there are approximately twelve million refugees in the world, mostly fleeing civil conflicts [2]. The presence of these refugees creates a number of consequences including the cost of their sustenance to already poor countries as well as the ensuing cycle of poverty and lack of development that are prime factors in the onset of new conflicts.

[1] Merriam-Webster online dictionary definition for 'civil war'. Available at: [www.m-w.com](http://www.m-w.com), February 5, 2006 (the date of access).

[2] Stedman, Stephen. IDL 104: Major Issues in International Conflict Management. Lecture 1. Stanford University.