The role of religion in the making and practice of foreign policy has been at the center of heated debates. We can attribute this interest to two main factors. The first is the rise in the number and prominence of religious actors in the international arena, and an increasing awareness on the part of the policy circles that religion is here to stay. In a message to State Department diplomats in Washington and overseas, the former US Secretary of State John Kerry said, “In every country, in every region of the world, and on nearly every issue central to U.S. foreign policy, religious institutions and actors are among the drivers of change” (Casey, 2015). The second is the rise in the number of academic publications on the issue of religion and international relations that goes beyond the relationship between religion and violence. Philpott (2002, p. 67) argued, “with few exceptions, international relations scholars have long assumed the absence of religion among the factors that influence states”. This long-term neglect has recently transformed into a vibrant research agenda within the past two decades. Political science scholars have written about religion and its connections to international relations theory (Sandal and Fox, 2013), military (Hassner, 2013), peacebuilding (Philpott, 2012, Sandal, 2017) and international organizations (Haynes, 2014). This renewed interest in the study of religion and politics spills into the field of foreign policy as well.

Before analyzing the linkages between religion and foreign policy, we should pay attention to how we define “religion” since there is no single definition of the concept, and how we define “foreign policy”. As Buzan and Little (2001) assert, international relations thinking should shift from mutually exclusive interpretations to an interconnected set of perspectives that complement each other. Religion indeed should be seen from such an inclusive perspective, and the lack of one single definition should not deter the foreign policy scholars who are ready to define carefully the aspect of religion used in an academic investigation. The same religion can have different policy manifestations in different settings; therefore, it is critical not to take religion as a monolithic concept (Sandal, 2012). In the study of foreign policy, religious phenomena can be investigated as an independent (as a cause), intervening (as a link between the cause and the resulting observation) and dependent variable (as the “product” of non-religious causes). Even when religion is captured as an independent variable, it is not assumed to be the single cause of any event. When it comes to defining “foreign policy”, the picture is clearer, although there are still multiple ways to approach the definition. This chapter takes the traditional understanding of foreign policy as a state’s strategy towards dealing with other states...
Religion and foreign policy

and international actors. However, it also recognizes that foreign policies are not just made in
vacuum, and they are influenced by transnational actors, local interest groups and the beliefs
of individual policy-makers. Similarly, a state’s foreign policy is not only about actions towards
other states; it includes the state’s strategy towards international organizations and transnational
networks, including terrorist groups.

Following these conceptual clarifications, we can study religion and foreign policy from
multiple perspectives and at multiple levels. There are examples of the theoretical approaches
towards religion and foreign policy that take into account the diverse linkages. Warner and
Walker (2011), for example, propose a framework of religion and foreign policy that allows
multiple causal explanations that include linkages among power, interests, institutions, ideas/culture
and agents. This chapter reviews such possible linkages and influences under four main
titles, reflecting four analytical levels: (1) religion’s influence on individuals (individual level);
(2) domestic actors, local politics and foreign policy (sub-state level); (3) states, foreign policy
and religion (state level); and (4) transnational actors and foreign policy (international/trans-
national level). These categories are not mutually exclusive, and there are inevitable overlaps
among them. For example, it might be difficult to separate the influence of the local churches
on foreign policy from the overall influence of the Vatican, or the World Council of Churches.
Despite this overlap, these categories help us evaluate contemporary questions of religion and
foreign policy in a more systematic manner.

Religion’s influence on individuals and foreign policy

Individuals might define themselves through religion, either because they believe in the ide-
ologies a religion has in itself, or for pragmatic reasons. Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord’s
Resistance Army in Uganda, called himself God’s spokesperson and created a political theology
that is a combination of Acholi nationalism and Christianity. The motivation behind the 11
September 2001 (9/11) attacks, and the attackers’ worldviews, was based at least in part on an
extreme version of Wahhabi Islamic worldview. Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists in Sri Lanka,
Hindu nationalists in India and ultra-orthodox Jews in Israel believe that it is their duty to
behave in line with their traditions, and they have a special political mandate. Religious actors
do not have to be the very decision-makers who make foreign policy to have an impact. They
can influence policies through public opinion and activism. Haynes (2008b, p. 143) addresses
this dynamic when he states, “If religious actors ‘get the ear’ of key foreign policy-makers
because of their shared religious beliefs, the former may become able to influence foreign policy
outcomes through the exercise of religious soft power”. Religious identity shapes how indi-
viduals perceive other countries and their policies as well. Ciftci and T ezcur (2016) show that
religious identity at the individual level affects favorability ratings of and the projection of soft
power by Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East. These views might put constraints
on the policy options of foreign policy decision-makers even if these decision-makers do not
share the same views.

Religion can influence foreign policies directly through the decision-makers who make
them. Guner (2012, p. 219) argues that “state leaders and decision makers can ascribe meanings
to reality by assessing foreign policy through their religious lenses”. Thus, religion can influence
how they “identify causes of global problems, allies, enemies” as well as how they assess national
interests. The Tibetan national movement and foreign policy have been influenced by the Dalai
Lama and his Buddhist beliefs (Dorjee, 2019). US presidents have used religious imagery to
legitimize their foreign policies. Carter’s conciliatory religious discourse enabled him to bring
different worldviews to the table, especially within the context of the Middle East peace process.
Bush’s worldview and the legitimacy of his policies have been challenged numerous times, even from a Christian perspective (Laaman, 2006). Albright (2006, p. 17), the US Secretary of State from 1997 to 2001, drew attention to the religious worldviews of the American presidents and how they helped create an exceptionalist American political culture. Inboden (2008, p. 259) highlights Eisenhower’s religious framing of the Cold War, noting his famous words, “when God comes in, communism has to go”. Religion was a critical factor in the Trump administration’s foreign policy, partly due to the influence of the evangelicals among his electorate (Ülgül, 2021; Haynes, 2021).

Religious individuals might also play significant roles in foreign policy and peacebuilding initiatives. The concept of faith-based diplomacy builds on the faith-based conflict resolution literature (Abu Nimer, 2001; Gopin, 2000). Its proponents argue that religion can facilitate reconciliation between enemies, solidarity with the poor and the overturning of unjust structures. There are also prominent religious figures who played the role of mediator in sensitive situations. One such example is the Anglican churchman Terry Waite, who was an assistant for Anglican communion affairs to the archbishop of Canterbury. Waite negotiated hostage releases with post-revolutionary Iran, Libya and Islamic Jihad (Lloyd, 2011, p. 229). Religious institutions and individuals play a crucial role in defusing crises and restoring stability.

While much of this literature focuses on grassroots efforts, faith-based diplomacy also covers state-to-state interactions (Cox and Philpott, 2003; Fahy, 2018). In her book, The Mighty and The Almighty, the former secretary of state Madeleine Albright explained how the US had not understood the motivations of religious states well enough. At the same time, Albright counts instances of how and where faith has played a key role in successful initiatives in American diplomacy. A famous example of faith-based peacemaking was orchestrated by President Jimmy Carter at Camp David in 1978, which would not have happened if Carter had not had the ability to “understand and appeal to the deep religious convictions of President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin”, Albright (2006, p. 77) argued.

**Domestic actors, politics and foreign policy**

Domestic actors, such as religious organizations, lobbies and local interest groups, can have an impact on foreign policy. This influence can happen through creating a strong public opinion on issues or connecting with transnational organizations to create pressure on decision-makers. Due to the changing scope of governance thanks to the advance of technology, religious actors also take part in civil society, transcending the distinction between the domestic and the international (Haustein and Tomalin, 2021; Rivlin, 2018). Individuals who share the same religious conviction around the world come together to challenge the premises of the traditional state structure. Religious institutions connect with each other to realize their local and transnational objectives.

Local religious actors can influence national and international politics, and they have access to resources. Religious organizations often have most of the organizational resources necessary for political mobilization. These resources include meeting places in which people regularly congregate. While these meetings are usually religious and social meetings, using those meetings to announce the details of a political mobilization campaign requires very little additional effort. Religious institutions also have communication networks. Active members of religious organizations tend to develop organizational and leadership skills that can also be applied to political activities. Religious institutions also often have considerable economic assets and good access to the media. In this vein, Kalyvas (2000, p. 393) argues that “religious entrepreneurs” are better able to initiate collective action and intense conflict. Ozdamar and Akbaba (2014), for
example, show that religious discrimination is an important predictor of initiating and becoming involved in international crises. Basedau, Pfeiffer and Vüllers (2016) also find that the overlap of religious and other identities, religious groups’ grievances and religious leaders’ calls for violence are factors that will likely fuel armed conflict.

Local religious organizations and groups also create and consolidate religious myths in the political sphere which might also have implications for foreign policy. Hindu nationalists make speeches for the liberation of Lord Ram’s birthplace and the phraseology is imbued with religious imagery (Shani, 2021). The Bharatiya Janata Party’s fierce stance led to an aggressive foreign policy and a faster development of nuclear weapons, not to mention harsher positions vis-à-vis Kashmir and Pakistan. In another case, Thaksin Shinawatra, former Prime Minister of Thailand, being aware of the strong Buddhist values of the society, employed religious rhetoric and made references to an influential ascetic monk and philosopher, Buddhadasa, in his political speeches (Phongpaichit and Baker, 2005, p. 137). Ironically, it is argued that his downfall was partly due to the spiritually informed Buddhist public opinion, which expected him to live up to the Buddhist standards he highlighted in his speeches (Kitiarsa, 2006).

Local politics and gestures can have foreign policy implications based on past traumas and experiences. The Yasukuni Shrine, dedicated to the spirits of those who died when fighting for Japan, has been at the center of political controversies since noted war criminals were also named among the spirits that are to be revered. The former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s visits to the shrine had angered the Chinese and the South Koreans as they signaled an aggressive form of Japanese nationalism that was proud of both its nationalist and Shinto heritage, even the most violent episodes. Local religious organizations, in conjunction with their transnational counterparts, might also use the soft power of religion in foreign policy and conflict resolution. Johnston and Sampson (1994) show how religious organizations have played a major role as mediators in ending conflict or facilitators of democratic change with case studies including Nicaragua, Nigeria, East Germany, the Philippines and South Africa.

Religiously inspired lobbies and interest groups might have an impact on foreign policy too. Walt and Mearsheimer (2006, p. 6), in their study of the influence of the Israeli lobby on American foreign policy, note, “interest groups can lobby elected representatives and members of the executive branch, make campaign contributions, vote in elections, try to mould public opinion” among other actions. Ziv (2021) states that regardless of the state of the armed Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the rising number of evangelicals in Latin American countries is correlated with these countries’ increased support for Israel. Amstutz (2013) argues that in the US, evangelicals translate their belief that humans were created in God’s image into a core principle of American foreign policy and took action on issues ranging from global poverty to foreign policy towards Israel. Ross (2013) explores how Muslim interest groups influence US, Canadian and UK foreign policies. Haynes (2020, p. 490) discusses how right-wing populist parties that claim to be representing Judeo-Christian culture in Norway, Denmark, and other European countries “place emphasis on gender equality, human rights, freedom of speech, individualism, and gay rights” in their discourses for both domestic and international audiences.

As the examples presented already indicate, one can observe the increasing influence of religious actors, including religious political parties, in secular settings. In an officially secular country, Turkey, the ruling party (AK Party) came to power due to its Islamic credentials. Although the party did not prove to be as “radical” as the secular circles expected, it challenged the conventional power politics wisdom from time to time, relying mostly on the Muslim public support. For example, in March 2003, the majority of the members of the parliament from the AK party voted against a resolution authorizing the deployment of the forces of its NATO ally, the US, to Turkey to open a northern front in a war against Iraq, a fellow Muslim-majority
country. Taydas and Ozdamar (2013, p. 13) report that then deputy Prime Minister Abdullahi Sener remembers that it was especially difficult “to convince the [AK] party’s pro-Islamist deput-
ies, who were being seriously pressured by the Islamist conservative media, intellectuals, and constituencies not to participate in the war”. This is a case that shows how local religious actors ranging from media to pundits can directly influence critical foreign policies.

Even nationalist groups that condone violence might have strong ties with religious institu-
tions. EOKA (Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston), a Greek Cypriot nationalist move-
ment that employed paramilitary activities to reach its goals, had ties with the Greek Orthodox Church and the Cypriot Orthodox Church (French, 2015; Novo, 2013). Groups or establish-
ments that are strongly affiliated with religious institutions might represent themselves as alter-
 natives to the traditional state. Some transnational religious groups that seek to take over states or territories within states and possibly transform them into religious states can have a consider-
able impact on international politics. In some states, this claim to political power is regarded as the primary security threat, coming before the threats that are posed by other states.

States, foreign policy and religion

Religious states are directly influenced by and also actively shape transnational religious ide-
 ologies, which we touch upon later. As Thomas (2005, p. 106) argues, Zionism is a trans-
national idea as is Pan-Islamism, each having its own symbols and “prophets”, yet both these ideas have contributed significantly to the interest formations and power definitions of individual state actors. In their foreign policy dealings, the leaders of religious states might make references to different understandings of world order, which they might perceive as natural and commonsensical. To illustrate, for Ayatollah Khomeini, the 1979 revolution in Iran that transformed the country into a religious state was only the first phase of a world Islamic Revolution. According to Khomeini, the revolution was to be spread by non-violent means because it was “self-evident” and thus, did not require enforcement (Hashmi, 1996, p. 23). Yousuf and Hussain (2022) show how religion continues to influence Iranian strategic culture and attitude towards nuclear hedging. Religious states usually have leadership claims, which might have a direct impact on their foreign and domestic policies. For example, Saudi Arabia (Sunni) and Iran (Shi’a) regard themselves as the champions of the Islamic societies, but the competition goes beyond the faultline of Sunni-Shi’a actors. Commenting on the Saudi-led blockade of Qatar, Gause (2017) reckons that “the real underlying conflict is not about Iran, but about very different understandings of how political Islam should relate to the state among the Sunni powers of the Middle East”. This intra-religious ideological competi-
tion, in short, has significant local and transnational implications, and shapes foreign policy accordingly.

It would be a mistake to conclude that a religious state or leader plays only by religious rules in foreign policy-making. Wainscott (2018), for example, notes that Morocco’s religious foreign policy was successful because it was paired with economic coordination. Basrur (2017) states that contrary to expectations, Modi’s foreign policy does not reflect Hinduism. Sharp (2003, p. 486) explains how the ambassador-designate of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Mullah Zaeef, operated as a link between the Islamic vision of the world and Western international society, and how the Taliban worked for international rec-
ognition as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. These dynamics have not changed after the re-establishment of the Taliban rule in Kabul in 2021. In its most recent reincarnation, the group still tries to reach out to other states – including the Western powers – for recognition and establishment of diplomatic ties.
When analyzing the influence of religion on foreign policy, it is crucial to recognize the history of the political ideologies and power struggles that empowered religious ideologies and states. The colonial experience has had a tremendous impact on the perceptions, fears and attitudes of the developing world. For example, Shahin (1998, p. 70) asserts that “many leading [Egyptian] Islamists have explicitly declared their commitment to democracy, but they frequently distinguish between democracy as a system of values and democracy as a policy instrument”. Some Islamists think that “the West has betrayed the modern humane ideals in its connection with the Muslim world, and the betrayal is best exemplified by colonialism and its lingering political and economic impacts” (Mentak, 2009, p. 119). In such cases, religious ideology and foreign policy decisions might be manifestations of resistance to the imperial and colonial interventions.

Religion can also be influential in foreign policies of the secular states. Nationalism, by itself, carries elements of religious ideologies. Nationalist perspectives are constantly renegotiated in the light of religious frameworks. Brubaker (2012) criticizes the understanding of nationalism as a distinctively secular phenomenon, stating that one can treat religion and nationalism as analogous phenomena; religion might help explain the features of nationalism; religion can be part of nationalism; and there can be forms of religious nationalism. Saat (2012), for example, shows how Malay identity is refashioned towards a tolerant Islam and the unwillingness of the ulama to define national identity independent of religion. In the Christian Orthodox world, the Serbian religious elite “developed their theological concepts on the basis of the idea that Serbian orthodoxy forms the heart of the Serbian national identity and that from a historical perspective the Serbia nation is under constant threat” (Van Dartel, 1992, p. 281). Ozturk and Sozeri (2018) demonstrate how Turkey is using Diyanet (Presidency of Religious Affairs) as a foreign policy tool in countries where there are significant Muslim populations. Carol and Hofheinz (2022) similarly demonstrate how Friday sermons in Germany link religion and homeland for the Turkish diaspora. When national identity is influenced by religion, there will be inevitable yet subtle manifestations of this underlying religious identity in foreign policy.

Another such manifestation is the political discourse that has religious references, and the employment of religious narratives in foreign policy. Brown and Theodossopoulos (2002) illustrate how Byzantine and Orthodox narratives prevail in the worldviews of the Greeks with regard to international relations. Similarly, Marsden (2011, p. 328) draws attention to the “city on a hill” image (from Matthew 5:14) and “manifest destiny” that has become “deeply ingrained within the American psyche”. Sandal (2021) illustrates how in the minds of Turkish citizens and officials, the ideal citizen is constructed as Sunni, emphasizing the difficulties of challenging the religious narratives that are rooted in the worldviews of regular citizens, and showing the foreign policy implications of such constructions, especially during times of crisis. As these examples show, national and communal narratives might carry strong religious overtones; through education, upbringing and other social interactions, prevalent narratives and discourses shape worldviews. These worldviews translate into public and foreign policies. Kraus (2009), for example, reports that many Washington-based advocacy groups use religious language to influence the public agenda. Studies have found that countries which intervene in ethnic conflicts tend to intervene primarily on behalf of minorities which belong to their religion (Zellman and Brown, 2022; Fox, 2004). This shows that in order for religion to be influential in foreign policy decisions, a state does not have to be religious. Existing repositories of national identity and social capital already have significant religious content.

When we look at religious narratives that shaped even secular nationalisms, it is common to come across references to sacred lands. Almost all religious states and even some secular states have attachment to their territories, which they see as vital to their identity. The importance
of holy places to the followers of a religion also makes acquiring or keeping sacred territories under one’s control a matter of security. Smith (2000, p. 805) argues that such covenantal ideas of election and attachment to the territory exist in a number of societies, including Armenia, Russia, Ethiopia, Northern Ireland, South Africa, India, Iran, and even in the US, among the Protestant revivalists. For such communities, the defense of these sacred lands is a matter of supreme national interest. The King of Saudi Arabia has the formal title of “The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques” (Khaadiim al-Haramain al-Sharifain), which indicates the responsibility for the protection of Mecca and Medina. Many states, even the secular ones like France and Germany, have had their sacred claim to the land, which shaped their national identity (Smith, 2004). These attachments and understanding of sacred land shape security conceptions and foreign policies. Hassner (2009) uses the concepts of divisible and indivisible conflicts to understand conflicts over holy spaces such as the ones in Jerusalem. Similarly, Svensson (2007) uses data on the primary parties’ religious demands and identities as well as all intrastate conflict-dyads in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 1989–2003, and finds that if the sides in a conflict make demands that are explicitly anchored in a religious tradition, they will come to perceive the conflicting issues as indivisible, and the conflict will be less likely to be settled through negotiations.

Many states, religious or secular, have also explored the soft power of religion or spiritual traditions. The soft power of an entity entails three resources: culture, political values and its policy (resting on legitimacy and moral authority) (Nye, 2004, p. 11). Chinese policy-makers, among others, recognized this “soft” power of religion, and since 2004, they have begun to establish Confucius Institutes around the world intended to promote friendly relationships with other countries. Cho and Katzenstein (2011) report that Korea also caught up with China in terms of reclaiming Confucianism as an asset. Wüst and Nicolai (2022) show how Morocco capitalizes on Islamic and Jewish religious and cultural policies to increase its soft power globally. Ozturk (2021) argues that Turkey exercises significant religious soft power in the Balkans.

The US was late in recognizing the importance of religion in diplomacy and foreign policy, which is surprising since it is arguably the world’s most powerful “modern” society with a high proportion of apparently highly religious people. Especially the increasing visibility of political Islam caught US and European foreign policy by surprise. Hurd (2007) criticizes the epistemological underpinnings of European and American foreign policy toward political Islam, and she argues that “secularist epistemology produces an understanding of ‘normal politics’ that lends a particular coloring to the politics of Muslim-majority societies”. Albright (2006, p. 177) also criticized the Bush administration for its lack of recognition of religion’s influence in non-Christian contexts: “One of the many ironies of U.S. policy is that the Bush administration, for all its faith-based initiatives, is far more comfortable working with secular leaders than with those Iraqis for whom religion is central. This is true even when the religious leaders are moderate in orientation and generally accepting the U.S. goals”.

Things have changed since Albright wrote her treatise. Jenichen (2019) finds that although the US foreign policy discursive structure is still secular, it is now more accommodative toward religion than the European Union. The US now has offices and institutions that facilitate religious engagement especially in foreign policy. The White House has an Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships that was established in 2001. Another office, the Office of Religion and Global Affairs, advises the Secretary of State on policy matters as they relate to religion and is a “first point of entry” for those who would like to engage the State Department in Washington on matters of religion and global affairs. Bettiza (2019) studies such offices, their functions and religious foreign policy frameworks, or “religious foreign policy regimes”, under the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations. In particular, he identifies four religious foreign
Religion and foreign policy

Policy regimes (i.e. explicitly religious foreign policy frameworks): International Religious Freedom, Faith-based Foreign Aid, Muslim and Islamic Interventions and Religious Engagement. The institutional changes, as well as personal leadership motives, show that religion is now recognized as a significant factor in shaping international relations and foreign policy, and it is up to states to use this influence to their advantage by careful communication and engagement.

Transnational actors and foreign policy

Ideas generate material conditions, and religious ideas have indeed played a transformative role throughout political history. Religious actors usually do not recognize national borders as natural (Mendelsohn, 2005, p. 55). Horowitz (2009, p. 192), in his study of the crusades and the importance of religious ideologies, maintains that “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”. Strong religious ideologies have the power to restructure not only the international system and its rules but also the terms of discourse and competition. Using religious outbidding frames, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and al-Qaeda have competed both with each other and other Islamic organizations with a claim to authenticity in the international arena (Sandal, 2021).

Evangelical Christians have significantly affected foreign policy-making and execution, particularly in relation to democratization, human rights, and religious freedom (Haynes, 2008a). Hertzke (2004) states that since the mid-1990s evangelicals have been the most important part of a new human rights movement. Similarly, Kayaoglu (2012) traces Islamic activism and dialogue of civilizations, which was initiated by the former Iranian President Muhammad Khatami. Bettiza and Dionigi (2015) follow up on this particular research area, investigating the dynamics of religious-based norms, promoted by non-Western norm-makers, within the institutional structures of the international liberal order.

Secular ideologies and concepts, such as nationalism, and their applications by the Western world can also change the terms of religious ideologies and foreign policies when they diffuse to the rest of the world; emphasis on “patriotism” intertwined with Islam and Hinduism in many groups’ and states’ foreign policies is a product of the diffusion of nationalism (Cesari, 2022). Transnational religious ideologies and organizations might have different manifestations and influence in different countries. Gill (1998), for example, asks the question of why the Catholic Church supported the governments of some Latin American states but supports the opposition in others. He finds that historically in most Latin American states the church had benefited from a religious monopoly supported by the government, undermining any interest in opposing the government in favor of social economic and political change. In many Latin American states, citizens were disillusioned with the church support for unpopular governments. This alienation from pro-establishment churches has contributed to conversions away from Catholicism to North American–style evangelical denominations.

There are many other examples of religious institutions having strong influence on shaping foreign policy and regional politics. The Serbian Orthodox Church, which was initially disappointed at the disinterest of Slobodan Milosevic in consolidating the social and the financial status of the clergy, strongly backed Serb nationalist parties in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Perica, 2004, p. 144). The church is geographically located in Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Republic of Macedonia and Croatia, and it has been politically active in furthering policies that have been in accord with the Serbian interests. Its influence has been coupled with the public religious expressions of the Orthodox leaders in the Balkans. Radovan Karadíc
and Ratko Mladic (respectively the political and military leaders of the Bosnian Serbs) “made great play of their Orthodox faith” (Bruce, 2003, p. 50). The Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian Catholic Churches challenged the spread of the communist ideologies, mostly subscribing to the Vatican II premises that emphasized individual freedoms (Mojzes, 1995, p. 294). Before the full-scale invasion in 2022, the Russian Orthodox Church was already active in Ukraine, rallying support for Russian policies in the region leading Ukraine’s Orthodox Church seeking independence of Moscow (Zinets, 2018; Shestoplates, 2020).

As we have indicated, religious actors might have different understandings of community that go beyond national borders. The influence of such actors on foreign policy would reflect this perception of community and its interest. Shani (2008) discusses two conceptions of universality that the Western international relations theory has ignored: one is the *Umma* constructed by the Islamist discourse that is simultaneously critical of imposed elite secularism and the neo-fundamentalism of Salafis; the other one is *Khalsa Panth*, the Sikh transnational community of believers. There are also institutions that bring together states and individuals under a religious identity. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is one example. Established in 1969, the OIC has 57 member states, and it defines itself as “the collective voice of the Muslim world”.

Religious networks can also play established roles due to their practices and traditions. Religious actors can, for example, encourage peace and reconciliation. Sandal (2017), for example, shows how religious epistemic communities, with their transnational linkages, contribute to both domestic and foreign policy changes. Another prominent example of a link between religious identity and a universally recognized niche is the case of Quakers and mediation practices. Quakers, also known as the Religious Society of Friends, are known for their social activism and pacifism. Quakers believe that there is no justification for the use of arms even when someone is confronted with evil. Traditionally, this basic premise has led the Quaker organizations like American Friends Service Committee to play the role of mediators in conflicts including the Israeli-Palestinian case (Gallagher, 2007). The Catholic Church and its relationships with its local networks directly affect “domestic political developments, intergroup conflict or alliance, and cultural and symbolic meanings” (Vallier, 1971, p. 490). In short, the interplay of transnational and local religious dynamics might influence foreign policy.

**Conclusion: prescriptions for an effective foreign policy**

The works mentioned under the four levels described earlier investigate the dynamics of religion and foreign policy. Most of these books and articles have concrete foreign policy implications. Given the centrality of religion to contemporary international affairs, practitioners cannot afford to ignore the academic studies that study critical links between religious phenomena and policy.

One common recommendation of this recent body of literature is to take religion seriously. The Westphalian state system has been predominantly secular, so religion has not attracted much attention in state dealings. The Cold War dynamics did not change this trend either. However, many issues that currently occupy the foreign policy agendas have religious dimensions. Farr (2008, p. 15) highlights these religious issues surrounding the US ranging from the surge of religion in China to the changing dynamics of the Islamic world and argues that US diplomacy should “treat faith as much as it does politics or economics”. Similarly, Patterson (2011, p. 105) states that religious literacy should be integrated into the “training, planning and execution of foreign policy”, and he calls for “a political strategy that ranges from presidential engagement to a major investment in holistic public diplomacy”. Learning the principles and
Religion and foreign policy

history of religious traditions will likely lead to more informed decisions. However, knowing is not enough by itself. It is also crucial to communicate with “the other” and to try to find common interest areas. Johnston (2011), based on his policy world experience as the president and founder of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, recommends deeper cultural engagement and even employing religious attachés to understand how others view the world. It is also critical to have what Joustra (2017) calls “principled secularism” and avoid specific definitions of what is religious and what is not.

There are other foreign policy recommendations in the literature on religion and politics. One is embracing the religious circles in local and transnational politics that are playing constructive roles in conflicts and development. After explaining the increasing activism of the evangelicals in American foreign policy, Mead (2006) recommends that “those concerned about US foreign policy would do well to reach out” to these groups even though they are likely to focus on US exceptionalism and “care more about US foreign policy than most realists prefer”. It is also important to support more inclusive public theologies rather than the violent ones. Religious texts can be helpful in that regard. Rees (2004) argues that the use of religious texts in international affairs may counter “reactionary traditionalism (the seedbed of religious fundamentalism) and traditionless individualism (the seedbed of economic exploitation)”. This usage is not without its challenges, especially when extremist groups selectively interpret sacred texts to their own advantage in their domestic and foreign policies in light of new existential challenges (Macdonald and Lorenzo-Dus, 2021; Hamming, 2020).

Freedom of religion has also been a significant concern, and it is increasingly evoked by foreign policy circles of multiple countries. Miles (2004), for example, states that the goal of American international policy on religion must be to ensure the security of all religions in every nation. Here, there is a need to merge the local and transnational understandings of human rights. Kilinc (2014) argues that the implementation of international norms on religious freedoms depends on the existence of strong domestic actors who support the reforms due to either their material interests or normative commitments. A constructive foreign policy would aim to strengthen the domestic and international actors who pay special attention to these freedoms, even if the ideologies and the goals of these actors are not in perfect alignment with narrow state interests.

References


Religion and foreign policy

Nukhet Sandal


