Toward Religion-Attentive Foreign Policy

A Report on an Anglo-American Dialogue

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Religious Freedom Project
BERKLEY CENTER for Religion, Peace & World Affairs
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

BRITISH COUNCIL

INSTITUTE for GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

"whether we like it or not, it is a faith-based world"

Workshop participant

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Disclaimer: The recommendations presented in this report represent the distillation of discussions held during two workshops. They do not necessarily represent the official views of any of the sponsoring institutions.

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Executive Summary

This report summarises key insights from the project 'Toward Better International Policy' which was comprised of two Anglo-American dialogues organised by the Centre for Religion and Public Life at the University of Leeds, the Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown University, and the Institute for Global Engagement. These dialogues were funded by the British Council under the 'Bridging Voices' programme.

This report is presented as a series of 'policy messages' or recommendations for diplomats and policy makers in both the US Department of State (DoS) and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). These recommendations seek to augment existing arrangements and to help diplomats attain 'religion attentiveness,' involving a greater strategic understanding of the way religion intersects with foreign policy priorities. We group these messages under three alliterative headings: capacity, conceptualisation, and culture.

1 Participants in the two dialogues noted efforts made by the State Department to improve its capacity to achieve 'religion attentiveness' in the diplomatic corps. These attempts began in 1998 with the establishment of the Office of International Religious Freedom and the position of Ambassador at Large. They continue with the establishment of an Office of Religion and Global Affairs in 2013. On the other side of the Atlantic, the FCO currently suffers from insufficient capacity to grapple with the complexities of these issues. The report therefore recommends:

- that **the FCO improve its ability to engage religious actors and dynamics** by appointing a director of religion and global issues who would be responsible for developing a cross-government religious engagement strategy.
- that in doing this work, **the FCO should emulate best practice from the international development community and elsewhere in Government;**
- and that **the FCO should leverage the considerable expertise that already exists within the diplomatic service**.

2. There are a range of conceptual issues which limit policy makers' understanding of 'religion' as a foreign policy issue. The report therefore recommends that diplomats and policy makers should:

- avoid the charge of 'instrumentalisation' by **seeking areas of mutual interest and working in a spirit of mutual respect;**
- **move beyond the 'world religions' paradigm** given that the lived reality of religion is fluid and does not fit the neat delineations provided by this model;
- **look for 'lived' as well as 'official' religion** and in particular should move beyond engagement with official religious clerics as they may not be truly representative of the populations they claim to represent;
- **be aware of problematic labels and be attuned to the ambiguity of key terms** used in discourses about religion. In most cases, it is preferable to use a longer descriptive phrase than a one-word label;
- develop the confidence to **know when *not* to engage religious actors** in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives;
- recognise that **'religion' includes, but means more than, Islam** and pay greater attention to both majority and minority religions in different contexts; it will also be important to get to grips with Christianity as it emerges as a non-Western phenomenon and to understand the various international models of religion-state relationship and the way this influences public policy;
- **recognise that religious freedom is a strategic mainstream foreign policy priority, not merely a human rights issue**, as a growing body of research is finding strong positive correlations between religious freedom and social stability, political moderation, the undermining of religion-related terrorism, and economic development;
- **be aware of the ambivalence of religion in its relationship to public policy goals:** religion can be both a source of extremism, persecution, and conflict, as well as a positive force for democratic stability, economic growth, health, education, development, humanitarian assistance, and other social goods;
- **focus on human security as well as international security,** recognising that religiously inspired threats to security sometimes also emerge out of experiences of violence and disruption that generate new modes of collective action and ideological diffusion;

3. Finally, participants identified a range of ways in which the culture of the DoS and FCO might change to increase the religion-attentiveness of diplomats and foreign policy makers. This report recommends that diplomats and policy makers should:

- recognise that **'doing religion' does not mean 'promoting religion'**. Engaging religious actors in pursuit of foreign policy objectives does not require diplomats to advance a theological position or any religious group. Instead, it requires diplomats and policy makers to appreciate the complex ways religion interacts with a range of factors, and they must engage with influential religious actors where appropriate;

- **improve the provision of education and training and make it mandatory**. A particular challenge is to reach beyond those who are already convinced of religion's relevance by incorporating modules on religion and religious engagement into core diplomatic training and by incentivising mid- and senior-level officials to attend religion and foreign policy courses;
- **continue to engage with contemporary scholarship and practice**. Partnerships between scholars, policy makers and NGOs will be critical in filling the current gaps in our knowledge regarding religion in international affairs.

Introduction

Religion is more important globally than at any time in the last 100 years. It has become increasingly clear that the prediction made by many social scientists and politicians that religion would either become publicly insignificant or even disappear completely was wrong. It is no longer possible to view religion as something of only private relevance, largely unconnected to broader geo-political dynamics and thus to foreign policy.

According to Scott Thomas[1], a number of key trends are set to intensify over the coming decades and religious dynamics are implicated in them all:

1. **The rise of the Global South:** The North is diminishing demographically – in 1900, it accounted for 32% of the world's population but by 2050 it is set to account for 10%. The Global South has far higher levels of religiosity than the Global North.
2. **The rise of megacities and mega-churches and mega-mosques:** Religion is set to become an increasingly urban phenomenon as the rising populations in the Global South settle in megacities which are havens for religious revivals.
3. **A shift in the relationship between Christianity and the West:** Christianity is a post-Western religion, dominated by the peoples, cultures, and countries of the Global South. Policy makers currently consider Islam to be the most urgent religious challenge but global Christianity is likely to become significant in the future.
4. **The rise of the middle class:** Most of the world will be middle class by 2020 but this new middle class will be predominantly non-white and non-Western. In China, for instance, the growing middle class is increasingly attracted to Pentecostalism and evangelical Christianity, both of which are experiencing a tremendous expansion.
5. **The rise of diasporas and refugees:** 3% of the world's population migrated in 2010. New diaspora communities are emerging and are contributing to the changing nature of international security. Diaspora communities and refugees are one of the most significant types of non-state actors in international relations.

As religion is implicated in all of these factors and religious resurgence is not limited to one specific region, it has become impossible for US and UK foreign policy makers to ignore religion as they seek to achieve their objectives of promoting freedom, civil society, democracy, social cohesion, and economic development across the world.

In 2006, Madeleine Albright[2] called for greater attention to be paid to religion by American diplomats: 'They should develop the ability to recognize where and how religious beliefs contribute to conflicts and when religious principles might be invoked to ease strife. They should also reorient our foreign policy institutions to take fully into account the immense power of religion to influence how people think, feel and act'.

Nearly ten years later, American and British diplomacies are increasingly attentive to the role of religion in global affairs. Both the U.S. State Department and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) are developing greater strategic understanding of complex religious dynamics and greater capacity to engage religious actors.

[1] Thomas, Scott. M (2010) 'A Globalized God', Foreign Affairs 89, 6: 93-101

[2] Albright, Madeleine (2007) The Mighty and the Almighty – Reflections on America, God and World Affairs, New York: HarperCollins pp. 67-88

Much of the Anglo-American progress on issues of religion and diplomacy has been generated by collaborations between government officials and outside experts. In both countries several mechanisms have been established to enable this sort of inside-outside dialogue and partnership on religious engagement.

To assist policymakers in developing this greater strategic understanding, a consortium of transatlantic partners convened an Anglo-American project on religion and diplomacy, as part of the British Council's 'Bridging Voices' programme. The consortium included the Centre for Religion and Public Life at the University of Leeds (UK), the Religious Freedom Project of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University (US), and the Institute for Global Engagement (US).

The programme centered around two policy workshops, one in Washington and the other in London. Both consultations brought together regional experts inside and outside government as well as scholars of religion in international affairs from both the US and UK. Leveraging their diverse perspectives and specialisms, participants grappled with the ways in which religion is related to the range of issues of concern to policy makers and diplomats. We focused on lesson-learning and sharing best practices, identifying opportunities for effective religion-related policy interventions.

The first consultation took place in January 2015 at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Participants examined the religious dimension of issues of conflict, development, and human rights in the Horn of Africa. Our conversation gave particular attention to learning from and building upon the existing work carried out by the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) and its Office of Religion and Global Affairs (RGA). We held the second consultation in March 2015 at Central Hall, Westminster, London. This conversation focused on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

This report offers the key insights from these transatlantic consultations, presented as a series of policy messages. Workshop participants noted recent developments in the State Department and, as a result, many of the policy messages are aimed specifically at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and offer suggestions as to how the FCO might further develop its capacity to understand and engage religious dynamics. Others points, however, (4-12 and 14-16) are of relevance to governments on both sides of the Atlantic.

The current context

Religious engagement has in recent years made gains within a traditionally religion-skeptical American diplomatic establishment. In 1998 Congress established the State Department Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF), headed by a very senior diplomatic official.

The current incumbent is Ambassador David Saperstein. He has the mission of advancing international religious freedom as part of U.S. foreign policy. In support of that mission, the IRF office issues an annual report on the status of religious freedom in every country. A separate and independent Commission on IRF provides annual reports, holds hearings, and issues recommendations to the State Department, the President, and the Congress on IRF policy.

The Obama Administration has pushed religious engagement beyond human rights promotion. In 2011 the Foreign Service Institute began offering a week-long training course on religion and foreign policy. In 2013 the White House released a National Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement. Later in 2013, Secretary of State John Kerry established the Office of Religion and Global Affairs (RGA), which is situated within the Secretary's office and is led by U.S. Special Representative Shaun Casey.

"it is no longer the case that religion is a career-killer"

Workshop participant

According to the State Department website, the office advises the Secretary on policy matters as they relate to religion; supports our posts and bureaus in their efforts to assess religious dynamics and engage religious actors; and serves as a first point of entry for individuals, both religious and secular, who would like to engage the State Department in Washington on matters of religion and global affairs.

The RGA Office now has over 20 staff and has incorporated the offices related to anti-Semitism, Muslim Communities, and the

Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The office also collaborates with the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships and the network of faith-based centers in agencies across the executive branch. Now the challenge for the RGA office is in demonstrating the tangible diplomatic benefit of religious engagement.

Compared to what Judd Birdsall[3] (2013) has called the State Department's "great leap faithward," the UK Foreign Office has a considerably leaner approach to religion-related policy making. Under the last Coalition Government, the promotion of international religious freedom was identified as a policy priority by Ministers and a small hub team was established to deliver on this and other human rights. While this team has taken on a broader role of promoting religious literacy, there is neither the remit nor the resource to tackle "religion and global affairs" comprehensively within the FCO. The Diplomatic Academy has a module on religion but this is elementary and, like other training on religion, is not mandatory for FCO officials. There has not yet been either the bureaucratic space or Ministerial will to engage with the way religion interacts with the full range of FCO objectives.

Key Regional Messages

As well as the general messages highlighted in this report, a number of key regional messages emerged from our focus on the Horn of Africa and Middle East and North Africa. These regional messages are summarised below.

The Middle East and North Africa

British and American diplomats encounter several challenges – historical, socio-economic, religio-cultural – when engaging the diverse nations of the MENA region. Due to the history of European imperialism, the MENA region can be said to suffer a certain "Postcolonial Stress Disorder," a sense of defeat that fuels resentment toward Western (including Israeli) power. While poor governance in MENA countries has also opened up space for extremist ideologies, an anti-Western attitude is further exacerbated by the perception that the West supports corrupt, authoritarian Arab leaders, thus undermining Western efforts to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. And when Western diplomats discuss concepts like religious freedom and pluralism, those terms often find little resonance where there is no clear differentiation between religion and the state, the sacred and the secular. In such a context, language associated with Western secularity is often perceived as anti-religious and anti-Islamic. And yet, diplomats must avoid the temptation to compensate by overly "religionising" the people and dynamics of the region. Construing public diplomacy in the region solely as "Muslim engagement" risks collapsing multifaceted identities into a singular religious identity. We need a more nuanced understanding of religion and its complex role in shaping MENA, and in particular there is a need for more social scientific research that could help promote evidence-based policy making in the region. Though the region's poverty, extremism, and poor governance are often linked to religion, we know that religion can often be a positive social force.

The Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa is on a 'religious faultline'. In the post-WWII era, it has been one of the most conflict-ridden areas in the world, and religion has contributed to most of these conflicts. Though 'fundamentalist' ideas are not new to the region, in the last few decades Islamist ideology has become more pronounced, with outside influences from Salafis and Wahabis radicalizing elements of the Muslim population and significantly changing the nature of Islam in countries like Sudan and Somalia. Overall the numbers of people associated with extremist groups are small but, because their acts are often highly destructive of human life and the stability of nations, these movements tend to get attention from both the West and governments in the Horn. Some argue that this increased attention generates more support for the extremists

The State Department undertook one of its first Religious Engagement Country Studies (RECS) in Ethiopia. This process demonstrated that while religion is associated with unrest in the region, a better understanding of religious dynamics and engagement with religious actors are effective ways to address conflict. Specifically, the RECS study emphasised the importance of moving beyond engagement with formal religious leaders and those with 'moderate' views. It is necessary to seek out a broader range of religious actors including women and youth as well as religionists whose views we find challenging.

[3]Birdsall, Judd (2013) "The State Department's Great Leap Faithward," 13 August 2013, Huffington Post **http://www.huffingtonpost.com/judd-birdsall/state-department-faith-based-office_b_3744290.html** accessed 4 January 2014

Policy Messages

In 2007 the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) published a report entitled Mixed Blessings, which analysed US Government engagement with religion in conflict-prone settings.

This report explained that "American interests will be better met through increased awareness and recognition of how religion affects international affairs."[4] The CSIS report identified three "obstacles" to be overcome in order to develop analytical tools and coherent strategies for approaching religion: capacity (creating the bureaucratic space for serious consideration of religion); conceptualisation (finding better and broader ways of understanding what religion is and how it might influence foreign policy actors); and culture (overcoming the reluctance of officials to address the issue of religion). We too have organised our policy messages around these same three obstacles. We borrow this structure as a way to acknowledge the impact of the *Mixed Blessings* report on American foreign policy and because our workshops demonstrated that these three sets of obstacles remain persistent challenges, particularly in the UK context.

Capacity

Policy Message 1

Improve the FCO's ability to assess religious dynamics and engage religious actors

In putting together the two workshops, finding people in the UK Government who had an interest in or identified themselves as having responsibility for 'religion related' policy was difficult. Religion, it seems, is treated as a discretionary variable rather than an important factor in almost any external engagement. Policy makers fear religion, having the sense that they 'got it wrong' in the past. Others are skeptical about the value of religious engagement. There is also confusion about the extent to which religious engagement or the promotion of religious freedom might contravene the Civil Service Code requirement of impartiality. As a result, the FCO, and perhaps the UK Government more broadly, suffers from a condition of 'religion blindness'.

"there is a need for an organisational structure to open up the conversation"

Workshop Participant

The FCO can improve the quality of its work by analysing religious dynamics and engaging religious actors—this is central to its ability to deliver security, prosperity, human rights, and consular assistance. The North American experience demonstrates both the importance and value of having strategic capability on religion. Yet to date, there has been both insufficient bureaucratic space and a lack of Ministerial will to 'do religion' more strategically in the FCO.

There is an urgent need for the FCO to develop a 'religion-attentive' diplomacy that builds on and beyond human rights advocacy. In its Manifesto, the Government made a commitment to "stand up for the freedom of people of all religions—and non-religious people". While this is a laudable goal, both the Washington and London workshops concluded that the UK Government needed to do more on religion than enhance its capacity on religious freedom. In other words, religious freedom is a human right but religion is more than just a human rights issue.

We recommend the appointment of a Director of Religion and Global Issues, ideally with a small supporting staff (or similar institutional arrangement) who would be responsible for developing and delivering a new cross-government Religious Engagement Strategy which would include—but not be limited to—work towards freedom of religion or belief.

This team would represent a single point of contact on issues of religion and foreign policy, would contribute to the development and delivery of improved training provision, and would help to socialise religious engagement across the FCO and the diplomatic service. The Director would be the UK counterpart to American and Canadian officials with the same mandate and could be an interlocutor with the growing community of diplomats in Europe who cover religious issues for their respective foreign ministries.

[4]Danan, Liora et al (2007) *Mixed Blessings: US Government Engagement with Religion in Conflict-Prone Settings*, Centre for Strategic and International Studies p.1

Policy Message 2

Emulate best practice from the international development community and elsewhere

In the early 2000s, the Department for International Development (DFID) embodied the principle expressed by Alistair Campbell (Tony Blair's Head of Communications) that "we don't do God." Yet in recent years, and particularly since 2010, DFID has increasingly sought to understand and engage religious dynamics, issues, and communities. In 2012, DFID published the Faith Partnership Principles document which identified three priorities for DFID's engagement with faith communities: 1) promote a common understanding of faith and development to challenge perceptions and build trust; 2) document the impact of faith groups on development; and 3) create a safe place for discussion particularly on areas of disagreement between faith groups and the Government. Significant progress has thus far been made on all three of these priorities, mirroring a similar awakening to religious dynamics in USAID and the broader international development community. Elsewhere in DFID, efforts are being made in seeking to understand the relationship between religion, conflict, and stabilisation. While there is no strategic centre within DFID for the consideration of religion, DFID has gone a long way to challenge the culture of "religion blindness" and as such is a best practice example for other HMG architecture.

We recommend that the FCO, in building its capacity for analysing religious dynamics and engaging religious actors, learn from best practice in DFID and elsewhere in Government such as the defence and security community.

Policy Message 3

Leverage expertise that already exists

It is hard not to see religion from the Embassy window. Most diplomats serve in highly religious contexts. Though they have not been institutionalized, religion-related engagements are a routine part of diplomacy. Workshop participants described diplomatic reporting on religion drawn not only from the Middle East and Horn of Africa but from a variety of unexpected contexts such as Russia, France, China, and Nepal. Doing religious engagement involves more than understanding religion; it also requires a willingness to engage directly with religious actors in the field to build mutual understanding and explore collaboration on shared goals.

We recommend that, in developing a religious engagement strategy, the FCO leverage expertise that already exists both among diplomats who have worked in highly religious contexts and among locally engaged staff who are themselves by definition embedded in local cultures.

Furthermore, the FCO's cadre of specialists (e.g. Arabists), who are traditionally deployed in other countries, could usefully contribute to the conversation.

Conceptualisation

Policy Message 4

Seek areas of mutual interest and work in a spirit of mutual respect

Given the nature of policy development and delivery, there may be a tendency for policy makers to treat religious ideas, institutions, and individuals as mere instruments who can help to deliver specific policy goals—without due consideration for the fact that religious communities have their own interests that may not always neatly align with American or British interests. Historic approaches to religious engagement have been criticised as stigmatising, ill-informed, and counterproductive. Of course some degree of instumentalisation is unavoidable for a profession whose purpose is to serve the interests of its country. Diplomats have many "instruments" in their diplomatic toolkit. For example, it may be helpful to leverage religious freedom promotion as a means to promoting security and prosperity. It may also be helpful for diplomats and foreign policy practitioners to employ the language and symbols of faith as a way to engage highly religious local populations. Diplomats should employ prudence in employing these tools, affording the maximum possible respect to religious individuals and communities. The key is to make use of these tools without making religious actors feel "used."

We recommend that foreign policy makers and diplomats develop more ways of working with religious actors, movements, and institutions in areas of mutual interest with a spirit of mutual respect rather than simply 'parachuting' them in as policy instruments. Such approaches are far more likely to be effective tools of diplomacy.

Policy Message 5

Move beyond the "world religions" paradigm

The lived reality of religion around the globe rarely fits the neat delineations of the traditional Western approach to the 'world religions.'

We recommend that religious literacy training for diplomats on both sides of the Atlantic should not merely include material on various beliefs and practices but also help them to think more carefully about how 'religion' itself is manifest in diverse settings.

In particular, there is a need to be attentive to:

1. **Religious hybridity:** The 'world religions paradigm' tends to present religionists as belonging to only one, discrete religious tradition. However, in many places the boundaries between religions are often not clear-cut, and people may practise or belong to more than one at the same time. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa people often practice African Traditional Religions (ATR) alongside Christianity or Islam.
2. **The collapse of the boundary between the secular and the religious:** The 'world religions paradigm' not only differentiates between religions but also between the religious and the secular. In practice, it is often not possible to clearly separate the religious from the secular in the way that Western models of religion demand—and even in the West the line is quite blurry. In highly religious contexts, people may not think about what they do or what influences them as being 'religious'. The relegation of religion to the private sphere of society does not fit the way that people live out their religion in many settings, including in the West.
3. **The varying importance of 'right belief':** Whereas the idea of 'right belief' or 'orthodoxy' is central to Christianity, other traditions such as Hinduism and Confucianism focus more on 'orthopraxy' or 'right action'. Definitions of religion that (over) emphasise belief and doctrine may not be helpful as they fail to capture their relative unimportance within some traditions.

"There is a need to recognise the fluidity of religion: how people relate to religion will change in different contexts across different points of time"

Workshop Participant

Policy Message 6

Look for 'lived' as well as 'official' religion

Western policy makers have tended to prioritise engagement with 'official' versions of religious traditions. Yet the 'lived religion' practised by people is equally important.

We recommend a religious engagement strategy that moves beyond engagement of official religious clerics; these leaders are sometimes not very representative of the communities they ostensibly represent.

Our diplomatic outreach must incorporate religious actors beyond the obvious places in order to get a full picture of patterns of religiosity in different settings. Furthermore, a focus on 'lived' religion is an apt response to the fluidity in religious life. A person's religious intensity, beliefs, and nature of affiliation can shift over time. These shifts can occur for a whole range of reasons linked to personal (e.g. life stage), social, and even geo-political reasons.

Policy Message 7

Be aware of problematic labels

Some terminology used to describe religious issues and actors can be counterproductive. On the one hand, diplomats and policy makers must seek to understand things as they are and to call them by their right names. On the other hand, terms can be used, read, and heard in different ways by different people, and often there is a politics of power underpinning the choice of certain words. Particular flash points are terms such as "radical," "extremist," and "fundamentalist," that are used to describe forms of Islam deemed to be dangerous by the West. Even less emotive terms like 'conservative', 'liberal' or 'moderate' may be underpinned by a politics that serves the interests of those using them. When such terms are used they should be employed with care and a concern for clarity.

We recommend that policy makers ensure they are attuned to the complexity and subjectivity of key terms used in discourses about religion as they endeavour to engage religious actors or ascertain the role of religion in different settings. In most cases, it is preferable to use a longer descriptive phrase rather than a one-word label.

Policy Message 8

Know when not to engage with religion

A religion-attentive diplomat will be able to recognise when religion is not central to a given issue and/or when engaging with religious actors could actually be detrimental to foreign policy objectives.

Religious dynamics must always be assessed alongside the range of other relevant factors, especially the national interests of the USA or the United Kingdom, as well as factors such as race, gender, or class.

We recommend that both the State Department and the FCO develop and maintain sufficient capacity to analyse religious dynamics in order to judge when religious ideas and actors are important drivers of a particular issue and when they are not.

Policy Message 9

Recognise that 'religion' includes but means more than Islam

Some believe that Western policy makers' engagements with religion have been disproportionately focussed on engaging with extreme interpretations of Islam. Though this focus is understandable in a post-9/11 world, there is a lingering perception that 'doing religion' in foreign policy simply means developing a better understanding of Islam. However, research into the Middle East and North Africa demonstrates that there is tremendous pluralism even in countries where Islam is the dominant religion.

We recommend that a religious engagement strategy should prioritize understanding both majority and minority religions in different contexts.

Religion may arise as an issue in contexts where we least expect it, making it important for diplomats to understand, for example, Russian Orthodoxy and Hindu and Buddhist nationalisms. Furthermore, the tendency of Western scholars and policy makers to assume that 'non-Western' means 'non-Christian' is flawed and there is a pressing need to get to grips with Christianity as it emerges as an increasingly non-Western phenomenon.

In addition, a priority should be placed on understanding the various international models of religion-state relationship and the way this influences public policy. In Tunisia, for example, Islam is the state religion but there is also a civil constitution. By contrast, in Nepal there is a secular state with an overwhelmingly Hindu population. In Ethiopia, there is no state religion and and it is against the law to form religious political parties, yet there remain tensions between the Orthodox, Protestant, and Muslim faiths. When it comes to religious engagement, it would be dangerous to take a 'one size fits all' approach.

"don't religionise every aspect of policy engagement"

Workshop Participant

Policy Message 10

Recognise that religious freedom is a strategic mainstream foreign policy priority, not merely a human rights issue

There is a increasing awareness on both sides of the Atlantic that religious freedom is a strategic issue, integrally connected to a range of positive indicators. A growing body of quantitative research is finding strong positive correlations between religious freedom and social stability, political moderation, and economic development.[5]

In light of these findings, British and American policymakers and diplomats should not dismiss religious freedom as a nice-to-have human right, an issue on the margins of serious foreign policy.

We recommend that religious freedom promotion be woven into mainstream foreign policy formulation and implementation. And officials working directly on religious freedom issues should continue to utilise the latest research in developing strategic arguments for religious freedom, tolerance and pluralism.

These sorts of arguments are particularly important when engaging governments and societal actors that are suspicious or openly hostile to human rights discourse. On such occasions it may be advantageous to avoid human rights language altogether, as it may be counterproductive. Arguments framed around economic and political self-interest may be much more effective.

Policy Message 11

Be aware of the ambivalence of religion in its relationship to public policy goals

In both of the priority regions we discussed in our workshops, religion has come to policy makers' attention because of its interconnection with security challenges. From Israel-Palestine and ISIS, to extremism in Somalia, it seems that religion is implicated in a range of global insecurities. Indeed, the State Department's Office for Religion and Global Affairs is giving special attention to this nexus between religion and conflict.

Yet we heard from US officials involved in the Religious Engagement Country Study process that "we went looking at a problem and came away seeing religion as a source of potential solutions." So too were the workshops evidence of the ambivalent relationship between religion and public policy goals. As well as religious extremism, religious persecution, and religious conflict, in the two workshops, we heard about the contribution of faith-based organisations, and of religious freedom itself, to improving health and education outcomes; in promoting economic development; and in delivering humanitarian assistance among other things.

We therefore recommend that a religious engagement strategy should be attentive to the complex range of ambivalent interactions between religion and foreign policy objectives.

[5]See e.g. Pew Research Center (2012) 'Rising Tide of Restrictions on Religion' **http://www.pewforum.org/2012/09/20/rising-tide-of-restrictions-on-religion-findings/** accessed 7 June 2015.

For socio-economic impacts see Grim, B.J., G. Clark, and R. Snyder (2014) "Is Religious Freedom Good for Business?: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis." Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion (Volume 10: Article 4); Grim, B.J. and R. Finke (2011) The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the 21st Century, Cambridge University Press and Grim, B.J. and R. Finke (2007) "Religious Persecution in Cross-National Context: Clashing Civilizations or Regulated Economies?" American Sociological Review 72:633-658.

Policy Message 12

Focus on human security as well as international security

For a time the Arab Spring made Western scholars and practitioners optimistic about the prospects for faith-inspired democratic change in the Middle East, but ISIS is shifting policy makers back toward viewing religion primarily through a security lens. While this focus may be justifiable, it is also the case that 'religious' security challenges emerge from human security issues.

As a result, we recommend that a religious engagement strategy must focus on the religion-human security nexus as well as the relationship between religion and international security priorities.

Furthermore, a strategy must take account of the range of modes in which there is religious involvement in human security: in Lebanon, there is multi-sectarian state system and a vibrant civil society in which religious organisations offer contractual services; in Turkey, there is a secular state system but the revival of Islamic influence is increasingly implicated in welfare reform; Egypt is heavily dependent on foreign aid yet development funding has focussed on the government and has not seriously combatted social inequalities or the inequalities of religious communities. Human security challenges require policy makers to understand different religious groups and the policy structures which underpin them—finding best practice means recognising religion as something which is anchored in social context.

Culture

Policy Message 13

Doing religion does not mean promoting religion

Historically, Western diplomacy has been indifferent to religion, and occasionally hostile to it. Both the US and UK Governments have made efforts in recent years to engage religious dynamics in service of British and American interests. To build on these developments is the primary aim of this report. However, to argue that British and American diplomacy must become more religion-attentive is not to suggest that diplomacy must become more 'religious.' Religious engagement is not the preserve of officials who are personally religious, nor does it entail the undue privileging of religious factors in political analysis.

"religion is a pragmatic reality of 21st century diplomacy"

Workshop Participant

We recommend that, in a world where religious ideas and institutions are increasingly salient factors in politics—for good and ill—all diplomats must 'do God' whether or not they believe in one. They must appreciate the complex ways religion interacts with a range of factors, and they must engage with influential religious actors and ideas where appropriate.

The State Department's Office of Religion and Global Affairs has notably framed its mission and vision entirely around mainstream, pragmatic and non-religious foreign policy goals.

Policy Message 14

Improve the provision of education and training and make it mandatory

In recent years both the State Department and the Foreign Office have made significant progress on enhancing institutional awareness of the role of religion in global affairs. On the American side, the Foreign Service Institute has offered an optional, week-long course on Religion and Foreign Policy since 2011. In the UK, the FCO's new Diplomatic Academy offers a basic module on religion and diplomacy; the Woolf Institute at Cambridge University helps to organise a one-day course on religion and foreign policy which runs 3 times a year, a regular series of lunchtime talks on issues of religion and global affairs, and they are developing a 2-day course on extremism and radicalisation; and DFID recently piloted a 2-day course on religion and conflict. Additionally, UK officials can also take part in courses offered by the European External Action Service in Brussels.

These training opportunities are critical initial steps, but more needs to be done to reach higher and further into the bureaucracy. Current training primarily reaches younger officials and those already convinced of religion's relevance.

We recommend that the State Department and Foreign Office find institutionally appropriate ways to incorporate modules on religion and religious engagement into core diplomatic training and incentivise mid- and senior-level officials to attend religion and foreign policy courses.

Given that these are shared challenges, the State Department and FCO should, where possible, share training resources, lessons learned, and best practices.

The State Department should also consider emulating the FCO in organising a lunchtime seminar series on religion and global affairs.

Policy Message 15

Continue to engage with contemporary scholarship and practice

It is clear that there are still many gaps in our knowledge about the role of religion in international affairs, including the opportunities and challenges for future religious engagement. Scholars have much to contribute to filling this knowledge gap but may not always know the questions that policy makers need answering. Similarly, NGOs working in this area have much expertise to offer to the policy community.

> *We recommend that there should be more opportunities for mutual exchange between policy makers, scholars, and NGOs to ensure that foreign policy is informed by the latest research--and vice-versa.*

While policy makers should aim for increased 'religious literacy' so should scholars and practitioners develop 'policy literacy' to ensure academic findings are conveyed with clarity and brevity. Policy makers should commission new research that targets objectives that have been co-produced with relevant scholars and should seek opportunities to include NGOs in both the development and delivery of policy.

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Toward Religion-Attentive Foreign Policy

A Report on an Anglo-American Dialogue