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Diplomacy and Religion: Seeking Common Interests and Engagement in a Dynamically Changing and Turbulent World

By Allen Keiswetter and Bishop John Chane

The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World
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For the tenth annual U.S.-Islamic World Forum, we returned once again to the city of Doha. The Forum, co-convened annually by the Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World and the State of Qatar, is the premier international gathering of leaders in government, civil society, academia, business, religion, and the media to discuss the most pressing issues facing the United States and global Muslim communities.

Each year, the Forum features a variety of platforms for thoughtful discussion and constructive engagement, including televised plenary sessions with prominent international figures addressing broad issues of global importance; sessions focused on a particular theme led by experts and policymakers; and working groups that bring together practitioners to develop partnerships and policy recommendations. The 2013 Forum continued its strong record of success. Over three days together, we assessed the impact of the significant transitions underway in Afghanistan and Pakistan, examined the economic challenges still looming in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in Egypt and throughout the region, and evaluated the regional effects and impact of the crisis in Syria. We also explored how art functions as a vehicle for political expression and accountability, and we examined how the events of the past decade in the Middle East have helped to shape Arab identity. For detailed proceedings of the Forum, including photographs, video coverage, and transcripts, please visit our website at <http://www.brookings.edu/about/projects/islamic-world>.

Each of the four working groups this year focused on a different theme, highlighting the multiple ways in which the United States and global Muslim communities

interact with each other. This year's working groups included: Rethinking the "Red Line": The Intersection of Free Speech, Religious Freedom, and Social Change; On the Brink: Avoiding Economic Collapse and Promoting Inclusive Growth in Egypt and Tunisia; Diplomacy and Religion: Seeking Common Interests and Engagement in a Dynamic World; and Advancing Women's Rights in Post-Conflict States: A Focus on Afghanistan, Egypt, and Libya.

The opinions reflected in the papers and any recommendations contained therein are solely the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the participants of the working groups or the Brookings Institution. All of the working group papers will be available on our website.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the State of Qatar for its partnership and vision in convening the Forum with us. In particular, we thank H.E. Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Jabr Al-Thani, the Minister's Assistant for International Cooperation Affairs and the Chairman of the Permanent Committee for Organizing Conferences; and H.E. Ambassador Mohammed Abdullah Mutib Al-Rumaihi for their collective support and dedication to the U.S. Islamic World Forum and the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World.

Sincerely,



Dr. William F. McCants
Fellow and Director
Project on U.S. Relations with the
Islamic World

Abstract

Conveners:

Allen Keiswetter
and Bishop John Chane

This Working Group brought together diplomats, clerics, and scholars to explore how religious communities and leaders on the one hand, and diplomats on the other, can find common interests and ways of common engagement in tackling international problems. It sought first to delineate the scope both religiously and diplomatically for cooperation on major foreign policy matters affecting the U.S. and Islamic world, and then took up some specific issues for discussion: U.S.-Iran Relations on Nuclear Issues; Middle East Peace Negotiations; and Religion and U.S. Diplomacy in the Arab transition states. While religious and diplomatic frameworks differ significantly, each recognizes the other's relevance to conflict resolution and human progress. How can these two approaches work together to better appreciate and incorporate the other perspective, to build common understandings of key concepts and of specific issues, and to engage in mutual endeavor to resolve pressing international problems? The group explored options for such shared understanding and collaboration.

Authors

Allen Keiswetter

United States

Allen Keiswetter is a scholar at the Middle East Institute, Senior Consultant at the law firm of Dentons US, LLP, and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Maryland. A retired Senior Foreign Service Officer, he has taught courses on Islam and the Middle East at the National War College and the National Defense Intelligence College. Keiswetter served as the Senior Advisor on the Middle East to the U.S. Delegation to the General Assembly. In his 36 years at the Department of State, Keiswetter was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Director of Arabian Peninsula Affairs in the Near East Bureau, and Director of the Office of Intelligence Liaison in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. He served as NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs in Brussels. He received his M.P.A. from Harvard University as well as a Certificate from Johns Hopkins School of International Studies. Keiswetter earned his A.B. from Dartmouth College.

Bishop John Bryson Chane

United States

John Bryson Chane is the eighth Bishop of Washington, D.C. and is a Senior Advisor on Interfaith Relations to the Washington National Cathedral. Prior to his appointment, Reverend Chane served as the President and CEO of the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation. He initiated a partnership between the Anglican Province of Southern Africa and the Diocese of Washington, which has engaged in HIV/AIDS prevention in the country of South Africa, human rights advocacy in the Kingdom of Swaziland, and malaria control and prevention in Mozambique, among other projects. In 2011, he was instrumental in freeing the American hikers held prisoner by Iranian authorities for a disputed border crossing from Afghanistan into Iran. Chane has participated in numerous conferences hosted by the Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights, Council of Foreign Relations, the U.S. State Department, and the Chautauqua Institution. He has appeared on ABC, CNN, CBS, and BBC Radio and won the Rumi Forum's Global Peacemakers Award. Chane graduated from Boston University and the Berkeley Center at Yale Divinity School, and received honorary doctorate degrees from the Virginia Theological Seminary, Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, and the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge.

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Introduction

The Working Group on Religion and Diplomacy explored how religious leaders and diplomats can find common interests and ways of engagement toward shared goals. As co-chair the Rt. Rev. John Bryson Chane, the Eighth Episcopal Bishop of Washington, rightly observed, “Religion in the 21st Century can be either a force for reconciliation and political stability or a wedge that deeply divides... It is now time for it to be used for reconciliation and diplomatic peacemaking.”¹

In the nearly nine hours of discussions at the U.S.-Islamic World Forum, June 9-11, in Doha, this working group brought together highly respected clerics and scholars as well as very experienced diplomats to delineate the scope, both religiously and diplomatically, for cooperation on major foreign policy issues affecting the United States and the Islamic world. The aim was to develop specific recommendations as to the way ahead. Of the world’s seven billion people, nearly six billion consider themselves to be members of a faith community. The question of cooperation is particularly important for the Christian and Muslim communities because they together constitute more than half the believers, and they expect to grow to even greater preponderance during the first half of the 21st Century.

On the diplomatic side, a seminal question considered was: What is the scope for religious influence on diplomatic problems? The ramifications are ex-

1. Bishop John Bryson Chane has repeated this phrase multiple times during his many presentations and sermons.

plored below in the section entitled *A Diplomatic View* outlining the concepts that shape a diplomat's consideration of the question and describing the diplomatic margins for establishing common objectives and views. On the religious side, the ultimate question was how can faith leaders be agents of engagement and change to make the world a less violent and volatile place? This side of the question is explored in the section entitled, *A Religious View* outlining the theological precepts and perspectives that undergird answers to this question. In some cases, the answer may well be an agreement to disagree but to do so in ways that enhance the potential for progress or minimize central disagreements. Commentaries on these views add personal experiences and details.

The working group also explored the prospects for engagement between religion and diplomacy regarding specific issues affecting U.S. relations with the Muslim world. In particular, the working group discussed prospects for significant religious–diplomatic cooperation in terms of giving useful advice, Track Two diplomacy, on-the-ground action, and initiatives to build a common sense of humanity regarding (1) the dynamics set in play by the Arab Spring; (2) the nuclear issue with Iran; and (3) the Middle East peace negotiations.

In its specific recommendations, the working group:

- Called for increased diplomatic and religious cooperation to support mutual peace and respect of basic human rights within and among religions;

- Endorsed the use of Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei's fatwa branding nuclear weapons un-Islamic as a potential basis for seeking a solution, in conjunction with other faith-based efforts to support nuclear disarmament; and
- Encouraged leaders of Abrahamic/Ibrahimi² religions to support renewed Middle East peace negotiations toward a two-state solution.

The religionization of politics and the politicization of religion, especially in the current dynamic environment, mean that increasingly religion plays a role in diplomacy both as an opportunity for engagement and as a motivation inspiring actors. Another central insight is the fact that religious leaders play important roles in their communities in shaping attitudes and peoples' understanding of the world around them. Thus, consultation with religious leaders should be a routine aspect of diplomatic outreach. Possibilities for interaction include both interfaith and intra-faith advice, Track Two diplomacy, on-the-ground social action, and state-led initiatives.

2. The Working Group endorsed the usage of both Abrahamic and Ibrahimi in respectful recognition of their shared heritage.

Diplomatic and Religious Perspectives on Collaboration

A Diplomatic View

Foundational Concepts. Diplomats customarily consider issues by an analysis of national interests. As a part of this approach, in the words of Madeleine Albright, “many practitioners of foreign policy – including me – have sought to separate religion from world politics, to liberate logic from beliefs that transcend logic.”³ Still, under the Obama Administration, there has been a movement to a more syncretic stance that acknowledges the possibilities of religious diplomatic cooperation because of the realization that religion is a large part of what motivates people and shapes their views.

President Obama in his administration’s national security strategy categorizes U.S. national interests under four rubrics: security, prosperity, values, and international order.⁴ These concepts are not in any way unique to the Obama administration as they also undergird the national security strategies of all U.S. presidents since the Reagan Administration wrote the first one in response to a legal mandate in the Goldwater Nichols Act of 1986. They reflect the terminology of the scholar-diplomat Donald Nuechterlein, who defines the fundamental national interests of the United States as “the defense and well-being of its

citizens, its territory, and the U.S. constitutional system,”⁵ and then divides national interests into defense of the homeland, economic well being, promotion of values, and favorable world order. Such fundamental interests primarily shape and explain foreign relations, dating back to Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

What differs for each administration is the human element. While values have long had a place in American foreign policy and in foreign relations generally, there are divergent schools of thought regarding the relative importance of normative values such as religion in a nation’s foreign policy. Realists typically assert that policy should be free of such considerations, while idealists posit a set of widely shared or even universal principles as central to advancing global order.⁶ Social constructivists note that values can and do play a role in foreign relations, but emphasize their subjective and malleable nature.⁷

Henry Kissinger, who along with some other officials of the past several decades reputedly remarked about a Latin American dictator, “he’s a bastard, but he is our bastard,”⁸ is frequently cited as a quintessential realist; Woodrow Wil-

3. Madeleine Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs* (New York: Harper, 2006), 73.

4. See “National Security Strategy” The White House, May 2010, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf.

5. See Donald E. Nuechterlein, “America Recommitted: A Superpower Assesses Its Role in a Turbulent World,” 2nd ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 15.

6. Jack Snyder, “One World, Rival Theories,” *Foreign Policy*, November 1, 2004, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2004/11/01/one_world_rival_theories.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Phrase has been attributed to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, President Truman, Henry Kissinger, as well others.

son, who sought to shape the post World War I world according to his Fourteen Points, as a liberal or idealist; and organizations such as the Green Movement or Seeds for Peace⁹ as social constructivists taking to heart anthropologist Margaret Mead's admonition, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." An offshoot of idealists, they share the view that social movements can and should shape international relations.¹⁰ In reality, most foreign policy practitioners manifest a mixture of these views in their work.

Interaction of Diplomacy and Religion. How diplomats define the common interest, especially regarding religious issues, depends to some extent on their perspective toward the world along the spectrum of realism to idealism. Stalin, an ultimate realist, famously asked, "The Pope. How many divisions does he have?"¹¹ In contrast, Jimmy Carter has averred that he never could have achieved his 1979 breakthrough at Camp David were it not for his ability to appeal to the religious convictions of President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin.

The scope diplomats see for cooperation in general and with religious leaders in particular depends on the circumstances they confront. Henry Kissinger, when he became Secretary of State in 1973 after serving as National Security Advisor for nearly four years under President Nixon, gathered foreign service officers in the Apollo Court of the Department of State to tell them he expected diplomatic analysis to set out "the objective circumstances" and then on that premise to identify "the opportunities and risks for U.S. policy."¹²

Kissinger's focus on state interests made sense during the Cold War but the attacks of 9/11 by a non-state terrorist group that claimed to defend the interests a major religious community led the U.S. government to reconsider how its diplomats engaged on religious issues. President Bush abandoned rhetoric speaking of "a crusade" after 9/11, gathered leaders of many faiths for common prayer, and revealed his own deep faith as a guide star of his decision making.

President Obama went a step further when he addressed the Muslim world in Cairo in June 2009, vowing,

Human history has often been a record of nations and tribes – and, yes, religions – subjugating one another in pursuit of their own interests. Yet in this new age, such attitudes are self-defeating. Given our interdependence, any world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will inevitably fail... Our problems must be dealt with through partnership; our progress must be shared.¹³

Obama also stressed religious freedom, relating he had seen firsthand Islam's proud tradition of tolerance while he was a child in Indonesia and observing "freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together." He went on to add that, "in fact, faith should bring us together... Around the world, we can turn dialogue into interfaith service, so bridges between peoples lead to action – whether it is combating malaria in Africa, or providing relief after a natural disaster."¹⁴

9. Seeds of Peace sends Israeli and Palestinian teenagers to summer camp together in an effort to inspire and equip "new generations of leaders from regions of conflict with the relationships, understanding, and skills needed to advance lasting peace." See Seeds of Peace, "About," <http://www.seedsofpeace.org> (17 September 2013).

10. See Snyder, *One World, Rival Theories*.

11. Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, Chartwell ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983) 135. Churchill attributes the line to Stalin in a meeting with French Prime Minister Laval in 1935. Others have reported Stalin used the line with Churchill himself and with President Roosevelt in wartime conversations. Supposedly, Pope Pius XII commented when he heard about the remark, "You can tell my son Joseph that he will meet my divisions in heaven."

12. Recollection of co-chair Allen Keiswetter, who was present at the gathering.

13. Barak H. Obama, "On a New Beginning", Cairo speech, June 4, 2009, University of Cairo, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09/.

14. *Ibid.*

Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, whose views on the role of religion in diplomacy straddle the realist and idealist traditions, argues the fundamental contribution that religion can make to diplomacy is that, “we share a kinship with one another, however distant it sometimes seems: we are all created in the image of God.” She relates, “In any conflict, reconciliation becomes possible when the antagonists cease dehumanizing each other and begin instead to see a bit of themselves in their enemy.”¹⁵ In her personal case, she says she seldom sat down with her counterparts from around the world without knowing there was at least some chance that they were right, too. In her view, that realization is the basis of tolerance.

Citing President Clinton’s observations, Albright avers that in practical diplomatic terms, faith-based diplomacy can be a useful tool of foreign policy. First, “religious leaders can help to validate a peace process before, during, and after negotiations; through dialogue and public statements, they can make peace easier to achieve and sustain.” Second, persuading people of different faiths to work together paves the way for them to acknowledge their common humanity. Once that occurs, “then compromise becomes easier because they’ve admitted that they are dealing with people like themselves.”¹⁶ Albright appropriately concludes, “Religion at its best can reinforce the core values necessary for people from different cultures to live in some degree of harmony. We should make the most of the possibility.”¹⁷ Albright’s generally positive but still ambivalent position on the prospects of diplomatic outreach to religious communities, leaders, and institutions reflects the view of many American diplomats.

The American predilection, then, has been to view religious identity and values as only marginally relevant to the conduct of diplomacy, and to seek to

separate such normative concepts from political analysis. But this approach is not necessarily shared in other cultures and regions of the world. In some cases, the public arena merges the religious and the political to a much greater extent than is common in countries where a strong conception of the separation of religion and state prevails. Because of this, American diplomats have sometimes struggled to understand politics in Muslim-majority countries where religion is an important part of the public sphere. That predilection is now evolving.

Margins of Interaction

Although diplomats have a difficult time engaging in religious issues despite their evident importance to U.S. interests, there are productive ways clerics and people of faith can engage with diplomats. Firstly, clerics and people of faith can advise diplomats. Every good diplomat listens carefully to religious points of view because, as Albright maintains, religion informs the worldview of both allies and adversaries. It is a form of situational intelligence that gives context and supplements other information. In the United States, advice comes from two different sources: from Americans who bring views to be considered in policy deliberations, and from foreigners whose insights frequently only they can provide.

During the tenure of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the Department of State sought to systemize its interaction with religious leaders by establishing the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group for the purpose of “ensuring the opportunity for mutual counsel and collaboration.” Established under the Federal Advisory Committee on Strategic Dialogue, the working group of about 100 religious leaders and State Department officials provides advice to the Secretary of State.¹⁸ It has recommended a series of actions under four

15. Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty*, 74.

16. *Ibid.*, 78.

17. *Ibid.*

18. The Working Group on Religion on Foreign Policy is one of six working groups Secretary Clinton established under her initiative “Strategic Dialogue with Civil Society.”

headings: (1) fostering a national capacity to guide diplomatic–religious issues; (2) directing the State Department to develop products for improved engagement with religion; (3) establishing an official mechanism within the State Department to take into account religious perspectives; and (4) institutionalizing the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group.

Secretary of State Kerry is considering these recommendations and other ideas for religious diplomatic cooperation. So far, he has appointed Shaun Casey, a United Methodist member and professor at Wesley Theological Seminar in Washington, to lead the State Department’s first Office of Faith-Based Initiatives, dedicated to partnership with global faith communities and leaders on priority issues such as Arab transitions, Mideast peace, climate change, and disability rights.¹⁹ In announcing the new office in August 2013, Secretary Kerry specifically acknowledged “the common ground of the Abrahamic faiths” and stated “we ignore the global impact of religion, in my judgment, at our peril.”²⁰

Secondly, clerics and faith leaders can engage in non-governmental or Track Two diplomacy. From the diplomatic view, Track Two diplomacy is useful to do what traditional diplomacy cannot do. It can establish the common humanity of each side so to build relationships and facilitate a search for common interests; it is a means of informally passing insights and messages to the other side as well as receiving them in return; and the interaction of the Track Two participants can produce ideas and initiatives that are then available to official negotiators for exploration or implementation. Still, Track Two diplomacy is only an intermediate stage whose aim is to produce or enhance direct diplomatic contacts. From the diplomatic point view, the

risks of such non-diplomatic substitutes are always that messages are not *prima facie* authoritative, and communications might be misunderstood, distorted, or bungled.

Thirdly, hands-on social constructivists, such as activists among clerics and social leaders, can do things to better society. Several faith-based organizations have taken as their premise the mission of establishing on-the-ground projects that seek to influence not only diplomacy but also societal development from the bottom up. A leader on the U.S. side is the International Center for the Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD), which has helped more than 1600 Pakistani *madrassas* (religious schools) in expanding their curriculums and transforming their pedagogy to promote critical thinking skills and greater adherence to principles of human rights and religious tolerance. In another project, ICRD has organized Cairo seminars bringing together Syrian opposition leaders to help them resolve their differences. The Gulen movement based in Turkey runs similar projects throughout the Muslim world and elsewhere. A primary project of the Gulen movement is the administration of secular schools, intended to be alternatives to *madrassas* in Pakistan and elsewhere. The movement also has extensive outreach programs which aim to bring American religious and political figures together with their Turkish counterparts.

Fourthly, clerics and faith leaders can offer initiatives that seek to use shared faith concepts as a means to build a sense of common humanity, at least among the Abrahamic/Ibrahmic faiths. This would include projects undertaken by Georgetown and Notre Dame universities, which published books such as *Forgiveness in International Politics*²¹ and the *Ambivalence of the Sacred*;²² sev-

19. Elizabeth Tenety, “State Dept. seeks to broaden religious reach,” *The Washington Post*, July 27, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/2013/07/26/79eeada8-f643-11e2-9434-60440856fadf_story.html.

20. John Kerry, “Remarks at the Launch of the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives,” Department of State, August 7, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/08/212781.htm>.

21. William Bole, Drew Christiansen, and Robert T. Hennemeyer, *Forgiveness in International Politics: An Alternative Road to Peace* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishop’s Publishing, 2004).

22. R. Scott Appleby, *Ambivalence of the Sacred* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

eral books edited or authored by Douglas Johnston²³; and the activities sponsored by the Center for the Strategic and International Studies and the United States Institute for Peace. Among governments, Iranian President Khatami launched a Dialogue of Civilizations in the 1990s that, for a time, became a platform to improve U.S.-Iranian relations. More recently, similar initiatives have included the Alliance of Civilizations promoted by Turkey and an interfaith dialogue sponsored by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia.

How does all this match up against the national security criteria of security, prosperity, values, and international order? Such collaboration can serve as an enabler in all these categories *if the undertakings are successful*. The downside is the risk highlighted in Madeleine Albright's observation: the intrusion of religion into diplomacy can allow logic to be trumped by beliefs that transcend logic despite the opportunities and insights it provides.

Compounding this risk is the fact that divisions within religions raise opportunities for classic realist balance-of-power politics in which outsiders balance opposing sects. Obama trod carefully in Cairo, remarking:

Among some Muslims, there's a disturbing tendency to measure one's own faith by the rejection of somebody else's faith. The richness of religious diversity must be upheld – whether it is for Maronites in Lebanon or the Copts in Egypt. And if we are being honest, fault lines must be closed among Muslims, as well, as the divisions between Sunni and Shi'ah have led to tragic violence, particularly in Iraq.²⁴

In a study of conflicts between 1945 and 2000, Jonathan Fox tests the Huntington Clash of Civilizations theory, in which civilizational groupings are largely

defined along religious demographic lines. Fox concludes that religion does not cause conflicts so much as it can exacerbate existing differences. Statistically, there were more conflicts within civilizations dominated by one Abrahamic/Ibrahmic faith or another than there were between them. Christianity topped the list, with Islam a close second. Fox attributes his finding to the fact that these religions and their sects frequently claim exclusivity.²⁵

In other words, diplomats, especially American, have increasingly come to recognize the value of religious engagement in international affairs. Yet diplomats are often wary of drawing attention to religious issues or engaging with religious leaders because of the potential to exacerbate, rather than bridge, differences of opinion.

A Religious View

Religious leaders can make the world a less violent and volatile place in several ways. Clerics, influenced by their religious experience and training, bring a different set of precepts and perspectives to international politics. Whereas diplomats often focus on common interests as a starting point for interaction, clerics tend to look for the common good.

Public Religion. One framework for religious leaders to engage in this manner is “public religion.” Jon Meacham in his book, *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation*²⁶, explains the important role religion played in the formation of the United States, including the respectful acceptance of Judaism and Islam. The Founding Fathers made a seminal distinction between civil religion and public religion. French Philosopher Rousseau best explained this difference by pointing out that civil religion is manmade, while public religion is about the broad expanse of God's role in creation, endowing

23. Douglas M. Johnston, Jr., *Religion, Terror and Error: US Foreign Policy and the Challenge of Spiritual Engagement* (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2011).; Barak H. Obama, “On a New Beginning,” Cairo speech, June 4, 2009, University of Cairo, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09/.

24. Obama, *On a New Beginning*.

25. Jonathan Fox, *Civilization and Civil War: 1945 through the New Millennium* (New York: Lexington Books, 2004).

26. Jon Meacham, *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2007).

humanity with clear and specific rights.²⁷ This God is active in history and acts within a larger context rather than just in the life of one particular race, religion, or nation. This concept of public religion is the foundation upon which religious leaders from around the world find themselves able to affirm their shared values and commitments and to come to a common table for discussion and action.

Religion as Divider or Reconciler. Religion can be either a force for reconciliation and political stability or a wedge that can divide. Timeless values of compassion and bearing the burdens of others are universally accepted by religions and spiritual philosophies throughout the world. Nearly all embrace friendship, reconciliation, peaceful coexistence among tribes, cultures, nations and states, respect for differences, and forgiveness. This mindset is not inconsistent with diplomatic precepts and perspectives.

One difficulty is that many diplomats do not fully appreciate religion's potential role as a positive partner. Foreign policy initiatives are mostly devoid of religious context or understanding. This lack can limit the diplomatic scope for brokering reconciliation and peacemaking efforts. In part, this reflects the fact that most diplomats have little theological training or background.

A second difficulty impeding effective religious diplomatic partnership is theological differences. Not all religious leaders disagree over these differences amicably, which can lead to tension between their respective communities. Ultimately the strength of diplomatic religious partnership is based on how respectfully we differ over our theological and political differences. When religious leaders and faith communities focus on fulfilling this imperative, they serve as an effective bridge for understanding.

Religion as a Bridge Builder. Foreign policy experts and diplomats should not discount religious leaders and activists as unreliable players in Track Two diplo-

macy or an unhealthy intrusion into the traditional discipline of diplomatic engagement. There are religious leaders and activists who have a significant track record in interreligious engagement and are not only respected within their own circles but also esteemed by other faith traditions. They can partner effectively in the diplomatic process. A prerequisite is that religious figures be given access to national leaders and foreign policy experts not only in times of peace but also in times of crisis or emergency.

Such Track Two religious engagement is not to be misinterpreted as merely placing well-established interfaith religious leaders on government appointed committees to study the role of religion in the diplomatic process. Rather, it is the direct engagement of religious leaders working with diplomats and foreign policy analysts in seeking solutions to complex foreign policy challenges affecting conflict stabilization and peace.

Fundamentalism and Compassion. In religion, especially in Islam and Christianity, fundamentalism has emerged as a response to modernity that promotes more conservative, less flexible, and more exclusive readings of the faith. This trend is already having profound effects on international relations. Professor Philip Jenkins of Penn State University has forecast rapid growth for both Christianity and Islam in Africa, Asia including especially China, the Middle East, Central and South America. His research indicates that new adherents to Christianity and Islam will be far more conservative in their interpretation of their faith and in their understanding of the Holy Books that are the radix of Christian and Islamic theology.²⁸

Such a perspective is already in play where more conservative and sometimes inerrant, radical, theological interpretations challenge mainline theological beliefs in both the Eastern and Western hemispheres. The expected surge of both Christian and Islamic fundamentalism could have a significant

27. *Ibid.*, 27.

28. See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Random House, 2002).

impact on the internal stability of nations and states and in their relationships with one another.

Nevertheless, at the core of the Abrahamic/Ibrahmic faiths compassion or bearing the burdens of others and such commonly held religious beliefs can help transcend the practice of pointing to enmity and divisions. Other commonly held values and beliefs include reconciliation where there is enmity, addressing concerns for global sustainability, and caring for the poor and the dispossessed. All of these could become bases for fostering collegiality between religious communities, even those of a fundamentalist persuasion.

Practical Observations from Religious Leaders and Diplomats

Diplomats should perceive religion and core religious values as an opportunity for discovering a new language for such engagement. The opportunity is now present to develop partnerships of diplomacy and religion to seek new ways in which to foster more humane, respectful, foreign policies that still preserve and protect a nation's self interest.

A Diplomat's Experience. In opening the workshop's discussion of the two perspectives, Ambassador Thomas Pickering, one of America's most accomplished diplomats, reflected that in his experience spanning countries with Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu majorities he found there is almost always a religious context that affects diplomacy. It is critical for diplomats to understand the special role religious leaders play in a dynamic world. Not only do religious leaders play political roles; religious motivations also inform political actors even if they profess to be secular. Thus, American diplomats should not be afraid of engaging religion in diplomacy even though they have been traditionally constrained by their perceptions of the proper role of religion in the state.

Ambassador Pickering endorsed the idea of talking to religious leaders to distill common values

as a means of facilitating diplomacy. Conversation with religious leaders provides opportunities to energize them and their followers in ways that emphasize the peace values of their faiths. He admitted the difficulty of convincing religious leaders "to open up to alternatives" that could facilitate conciliation when they might challenge religious predispositions. In such circumstances, he has found that listening is more important than speaking for diplomats because it helps establish areas for cooperation and provides the opportunity to learn what religious leaders mean, not just what they say. As a way to enhance the potential for progress and minimize central disagreements, he recommended "salami slicing" problems into smaller pieces.

A Cleric's Experience. Cardinal Theodore McCarrick related that the U.S. Department of State began systematically tracking treatment of religious communities abroad after the Secretary of State and other officials of the Department held conversations with a group of religious leaders. The National Interreligious Leadership Initiative (NILI) has made routine such consultations that seek to alert the State Department to the religious importance of diplomatic issues in the Holy Land. In another example of the potential for religious diplomatic cooperation, Cardinal McCarrick cited religious leaders in the Holy Land itself, who have found common ground to condemn terrorism even though they cannot come together on political issues. They have found ways to conciliate by building on the concept of "the dignity of the other" in order to lessen differences. In Cardinal McCarrick's experience, reconciliation comes from the center of each faith tradition, not the extremes. Advocating that each faith should deal with its own extremists, he remarked, "we each need to wash out our own houses."

Cardinal McCarrick averred that faith leaders fail in their "responsibilities to heal the world" if they do not seek to engage as agents of change. The practical formula for engagement is first talking

with each other, and then talking *to* each other. If repeated often enough, this process leads to understanding, respect, and trust that can form the basis to work with each other. Frequently, conciliation fails because the parties jump to working together without satisfying the prior requirements. This formula applies not only among faith leaders but also to conversations among diplomats and clerics. In his experience worldwide, religion has been more of a reconciler than a divider.

Other Commentators. Muslim respondents emphasized the core values set out regarding peacemaking in the Qur'an, especially the Qur'anic injunction that God has created the world into nations and tribes so that humankind can know one another.²⁹ A leading Imam observed that religion and politics commingle throughout the Middle East. He warned against the cynical use of religion, such as Saddam Hussein's embrace of Islam during his final years in power and the appeal to religion to defeat the Soviets in Afghanistan. He endorsed the idea that "solutions have to come from within," describing how Imams had rejected non-Muslim NGOs who offered training aimed at stemming violence against women but accepted the training when offered by their co-religionists. An academic respondent agreed with this notion, observing that co-religionists are more likely to accept the advice of each other than of outsiders.

Another Muslim leader pointed to a need for a paradigm shift in dealing with the challenges between religion and the state throughout the Muslim world. He asked, "where do you draw the line concerning religion in discussions of socio-religious issues?" The core problem in his view has been to identify role models respectful of history, culture, and religion. On the international level, the Iranian-initiated Dialogue of Civilizations, the Turkish Alliance of Civilizations, and a Saudi-sponsored interfaith dialogue, are beginnings.

Among non-religious leaders, an official recounted the Obama administration's efforts to engage religion with diplomacy. The State Department's Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group is considering how to work with the spiritual descendants of Abraham to develop a network of pilgrimage paths connecting sacred sites across the ten Middle Eastern countries where Abraham traveled. One example would be to demine the Jordan River Valley, including the third holiest site to Christians—the baptismal site of Jesus in the West Bank. The official recognized that American diplomacy could advance core values of peacemaking by addressing the fact that nearly 85 percent of the world's population is believers, with faith a principal motivating factor in their lives.

Regarding U.S. policy in transition countries affected by conflict, officials emphasized the importance of locally driven approaches that identify key political and religious actors, the roles they could play as catalysts for change, and the possibilities for concerted action with civil society partners that might produce systemic change within 12-18 months. A network of influential religious and political actors could offer critical leadership with moral authority to influence the three important sectors of security, governance and civil society.³⁰

A civil society proponent advised that while governments should embrace and build on projects aimed at on-the-ground religious peacemaking, governments destroy such projects' credibility if they try to "own" them. He cited examples of reforms of *madrassas* in Pakistan that only succeeded because they were non-governmental projects. Grounded in the Qur'an, the reforms won the support even of a commander from the terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Taiba, who after training appeared on CNN to commend the reform program. The civil society proponent drew the lesson that once you get past the veneer of hostility and rage, the program's participants not only benefitted from the training but also championed it publicly.

30. Conversations with participants in State Department's Workshop on Religion and Diplomacy, April-June, 2013.

Specific Issues for Religious Diplomatic Cooperation in a Dynamic World

This section explores the engagement between religion and diplomacy with reference to three major foreign policy issues affecting U.S. relations with the Muslim world. What are the prospects for significant religious-diplomatic cooperation in terms of advice, Track Two diplomacy, on-the-ground action, and initiatives to build a common sense of humanity regarding (1) the dynamics set in play by the Arab Spring; (2) the nuclear issue with Iran; and (3) the Middle East peace negotiations?

1) The Arab Spring: Religion and U.S. Diplomacy in the Democratic Transition States

From a diplomatic point of view, the Arab Spring has pushed religion to the fore as a primary consideration in U.S. foreign policy because religious motivations drive many of the significant players: Islamists are governing in Tunisia and Iraq, and held power for more than a year in Egypt after winning large majorities in initial elections; religious factors and minority rights are at the heart of the conflicts in Syria, Bahrain, Afghanistan and Mali; and religious issues also play actively in the transition in Yemen and Libya. In these instances, religion threatens to be a force for division more than a force for unity. Sunni-Shi'ah divisions have become so pronounced that Geneive Abdo, in a new study released by the Brookings Institution, argues that

the sectarian Sunni-Shi'ah divide will replace Palestinian problems as the overriding issue in the Islamic World.³¹

In addition, some Americans look at the Arab transitions with concern because they suspect that religiously driven political actors in these Muslim countries hold views incompatible either with democratic values, with American policy preferences, or with both. While the U.S. government has embraced democratic change in the Middle East, and even elevated it to a U.S. interest, such anxieties present a challenge to effective U.S. diplomacy and engagement with these transitional societies.

In 1992, in the first major speech about Islam and diplomacy in the Middle East, Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Edward Djerejian set the tone for U.S. policy for the succeeding two decades. His remarks at Meridian House International were prompted by the Islamist threat in Algeria:

Those who seek to broaden political participation in the Middle East...will find us supportive, as we have been elsewhere in the world. At the same time, we are suspect of those who use the democratic process to come to power, only to destroy that very process in order to retain power and political dominance. While we believe in

31. Geneive Abdo, "The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide," Analysis Paper no. 29, Saban Center at the Brookings Institution, April 2013.

the principle of “one person, one vote,” we do not support “one person, one vote, one time.” Let me make it very clear with whom we differ. We differ

With those, regardless of their religion, who practice terrorism, oppress minorities, preach intolerance or violate international standards of conduct regarding human rights;

With those who are insensitive to the needs of political pluralism;

With those who cloak their message in another brand of authoritarianism;

With those who substitute religious and political confrontation for constructive engagement with the rest of the world;

With those who do not share our commitment to peaceful resolution of conflict, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict; and

With those who would pursue their goals through repression or violence.³²

These precepts still largely prevail in U.S. policy, even though the United States has made adaptations that take into account the differing circumstances among countries.

From a religious point of view, the Arab Spring’s successful overthrow of unpopular and corrupt Middle Eastern political regimes by people disrespected and dispossessed by their leaders incites awe at the turn of events even though the results vary widely from country to country. As with diplomats, the top issue for clerics is Syria. All religions should condemn the violence there and not inhibit peacemaking efforts to end the atrocities destroying Syria and destabilizing the region. Track Two religious diplomacy must

engage in the work of addressing this crisis and partner with diplomatic community to seek an end to this crime against humanity.

A second issue is treatment of religious minorities. This is a major problem throughout much of the Middle East. Just as treatment of Muslims in non-Muslim majority countries rightly raises concern in the Islamic world, the treatment of Christians in the Arab world raises concern among coreligionists in the West. Christians have been leaving the Middle East in alarming numbers. Millions have left in the last few decades with the end result being that throughout the region there are fewer than twelve million Christians left.³³

Since the 1975 civil war, half of Lebanon’s Christian population has fled. Today, in Egypt, the flight of Coptic Christians gains momentum daily. The only reason that the base population remains about six million faithful souls is because of significant increases in the birthrate. Radical Sunni Muslims groups have attacked Coptic Churches and Egyptian laws discriminate against the Copts. Since 1991, Iraq’s Christian population has also dramatically decreased in number. Indeed, where Christianity once was a large and historic presence throughout the region, the trend today is of Christian emigration outside of it.

These examples raise questions of vigilance from the religious perspective as to how far the United States can go in protecting its self-interests in the Middle East. Morally, what are its obligations in regard to the Arab Spring? How can minority rights be protected? What about the financial and moral price tag at home and abroad? How do others see the United States as a democratic nation living under the rule of law?

32. “The US and the Middle East in a Changing World,” *The DISAM Journal* (Summer 1992), http://www.disam.dsca.mil/pubs/Vol%2014_4/Djerejian.pdf.

33. Mary Jane Deeb, interview by Ray Suarez, *NewsHour*, PBS, September 17, 2012, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/religion/july-dec12/christians_09-17.html; see Rupert Shortt, *Christianophobia: a Faith under Attack* (London: Rider Books, 2012).

Practical Observations from Religious Leaders and Diplomats

The working group discussion brought out the role of religion in social change and democratic transition that, in the words of Ambassador Pickering, provides the context for diplomacy. Commentators spoke from their experiences and offered examples of how to overcome the religious crises faced by people of faith living in the Arab Spring countries and other countries experiencing democratic transitions.

Syria. Both diplomats and clerics believed the Syria crisis could not be solved militarily and expressed great concern over the exploding humanitarian disaster and the threatening regional destabilization. One diplomat proposed a humanitarian ceasefire in Syria followed by elections for a new parliament that would form a transitional government and write a new constitution. It was observed, however, that a ceasefire could lock in positions favoring the Assad regime. An academic suggested that intra-religious connections might help constrain the strife.

Lebanon. A senior Muslim cleric advocated making Lebanon a model of a peaceful, religiously-tolerant country based on civic values that respect human rights and the freedoms of religion and expression. Israel and Hezbollah are at the center of the Lebanon's problems. Particularly troublesome is the fact that Hezbollah has external aims, not that it is a Shi'i organization. He stressed the importance of protecting minority rights and advocated a positive approach that emphasizes equal rights to all citizens.

Egypt. A scholar speaking about religion and politics in Egypt differentiated between Islam and Islamism, the latter being derivative from Mohammad Abdu and other nineteenth century Muslim intellectuals. In the scholar's view, Islamist parties use Islam as a political card they can play. What is happening now in Egypt is a struggle between incompatible ideas of governance, social justice, accountability, legal sys-

tems, and distribution of power and wealth. The scholar recommended not to follow the rhetoric but rather the actions of the players.

Nigeria. In Nigeria too there has been a politicization of religion that exacerbates tensions between Nigeria's Muslim and Christian populations. One participant remarked, "in Nigeria you can market virtually anything using religion." A practitioner of reconciliation on the local level described a conflicted tripartite system of law based on Islamic Shari'a, tribal customary law, and English common law. In these circumstances, he observed there has been a politicization of religion and a religionizing of the political process. The result has been the rise of Boko Haram and the intensification of the Christian-Muslim conflict. Among the tools at hand for reconciliation is Track Two diplomacy to build bridges among religious and political actors regarding civic education and electoral reforms so as to create "a community scorecard" to set goals and measure progress.

Mali. Qadhafi's overthrow triggered an invasion of militants returning from Libya, which exacerbated Mali's north-south religious and tribal tensions. After foreign intervention in the north in the Spring of 2013, Mali is now engaged in a process of reconciliation. In the past, an alliance of Christian and Muslim leaders played a stabilizing role during times of turmoil. Furthermore, the Ministry of Religion has had a role in assuring national unity, and is now assisting in bringing together religious leaders as part of the process of reconciliation and restoration of stability.

Indonesia. A researcher discussed the lessons for current transition states from Indonesia's own experience with democracy. Indonesia's state philosophy of *pancasila* includes five tenets that seek to unify the political, religious, and cultural traditions of the 5000 islands with 700 languages that constitute the country: one God, the unity of the country, the unity of humanity, democ-

racy, and social justice. Religious leaders played a significant role in Suharto's removal by advising him to resign in 1998. The researcher pointed out that successful political parties in Indonesia have always been open liberal parties as opposed to parties with a religious base. In any event, Indonesian Muslim leaders widely affirm that Islam is compatible with democracy.

U.S. Role. A senior diplomat who served in several countries now in transition described three tensions in U.S. policy. First, the United States has competing interests in most transition countries. In Egypt, for example, the United States has huge interests in democratization as well as in preserving the Egyptian-Israel peace treaty. The challenge is to advance multiple interests so as to prevent them from coming too much in conflict.

The second tension is time: how much influence to use for short term effect versus long term gain, a conundrum epitomized by the decision whether to cut aid to protest democratic setbacks. Finally, there is the tension of whether outside religious figures help or aggravate a situation. The bottom line is there are no perfect solutions to resolve all of these tensions.

Commentators agreed that dealing with these tensions is a conundrum for U.S. policy. One remarked that rarely can foreign countries affect internal issues through direct intervention with the officials or religious leaders involved. In his view, it is better to utilize long-term indirect intervention such as exchanges, training, and institution building. Other commentators cautioned that mistrust of the United States in the region may complicate any U.S. plan in transition states and challenged whether training of U.S. diplomats could effectively make a difference.

A resident of the Gulf who characterized his opinions as "views from the street" argued that the United States and the Islamic World should deeply

explore problems to discover fundamental causes. He cited the Arab-Israeli conflict as one source of turmoil. Another is the lack of understanding nations and peoples; Americans should recognize that "we speak with accents, but we do not think with accents." In his estimation, the core U.S. diplomatic strengths in the Middle East are its values and its vibrant sense of entrepreneurship.

Overview. In the words of one analyst, the lesson of the discussion was that "context matters; so do human dignity and issues of identity." The interfaith example of *pancasila* in Indonesia is instructive but may have limited applicability because of differences with the transition states of the Middle East.

It is important to recognize that there has been a religionization of politics as well as a politicization of religion. An essential question is whether Islamic groups support pluralism. Neither the United States nor others should shy away from promoting pluralism, which entails strengthening civil society even more than is happening today. Given the persistence of turmoil and the changing dynamics in play, the U.S. diplomatic community should continue to take to heart the advice of watching what religious actors do, not just what they say.

2) *U.S.-Iran Relations on the Nuclear Issue*

Through a diplomatic lens, the international tension over Iran's nuclear program brings the role of religion and religious leaders to the fore, since the current regime is rooted in a religious construction of politics, and because of the role of Shi'i Muslim clerical authorities. The Iranian nuclear issue thus highlights both the risks and the opportunities for religious engagement on behalf of conflict resolution.

The actual scope for religious diplomatic interaction depends on the perspective of the analyst. Analysts who see Iran as hell-bent on obtaining a nuclear weapons capacity because of geopolitical

and historical reasons have little hope for diplomacy and other possible means of accommodation such as Track Two discussions. On the other hand, analysts who believe that Iranian authorities still have not made a decision to weaponize its nuclear program see more scope for diplomacy to influence Iran's calculus.

Objective conditions that could portend the possible utility of religious collaboration include the great need to build trust between the two sides separated by years of little diplomatic contact; the fact that Track Two diplomacy channels have already been established among clerics on both sides; and the emergence in the past couple of years of an issue that could provide a diplomatic opening. According to Iranian officials, Supreme Leader Khamenei has repeatedly reaffirmed a fatwa in which nuclear weapons are branded "anti-Islamic," "a sin" as well as "useless, harmful and dangerous."³⁴ For several months Secretary of State Clinton seized on these pronouncements as an opportunity for diplomacy. Most recently, President Obama while making a visit to Israel and Jordan in March, stated that "if in fact what the Supreme Leader has said is the case, which is that developing a nuclear weapon would be unIslamic and that Iran has no interest in developing nuclear weapons, then there should be a practical, verifiable way to assure the international community that it's not doing so. And this problem will be solved."³⁵ Given the very limited, direct U.S. diplomatic contacts with Iran as well as the theological nature of the subject, religious Track Two diplomacy provides one path of pursuing this possible opening.

Viewed through a religious lens, the ongoing development, production and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), especially nuclear weapons, reflect the tragic reality of failed statesmanship

and leadership. The ability of nuclear weapons to literally decimate whole populations and cripple nations could destroy the very fabric of the earth. Stewardship of the earth and its resources is a requirement of the Abrahamic/Ibrahmic faiths and such stewardship of creation is a significant piece of the Indic religions and non-theistic philosophies.

The current controversy surrounding Iran's enrichment of uranium creates great tensions. The discussions of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the negotiations of P5+1 (Russia, the United States, China, France, the United Kingdom and Germany) with Iran have so far failed to achieve a breakthrough. In this context, Track Two religious diplomacy could present an opportune way of engaging in closely held conversations with religious leaders in Iran who have influence over the national security apparatus of the country and could facilitate diplomatic agreement.

Practical Observations from Religious Leaders and Diplomats

A strong diplomatic proponent of using Supreme Leader Khamenei's fatwa as a framework for negotiation emphasized that it represents not only the Iranian government's declaratory policy and strategy but also a profoundly religious stance now restated many times. The election of the new Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, presents an excellent opportunity for President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry to reach out to the Iranians by offering to work together using the fatwa as an opening. He and others recalled their Track Two experiences as examples of how such diplomacy could be helpful. Several clerics noted that Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders as well as other Muslim authorities have reached conclusions similar to those put forward in the fatwa.

34. See "Leader's fatwa on nuclear weapons binding for Iran: Foreign Ministry," PressTV, January 15, 2013, <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/01/15/283656/iran-urges-more-pakistan-antiterror-bids/>.

35. See "Remarks by President Obama and His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan in Joint Press Conference," March 22, 2013, Al Hummar Offices, Amman, Jordan, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/22/remarks-president-obama-and-his-majesty-king-abdullah-ii-jordan-joint-pr>.

A diplomatic skeptic argued that the differences between the United States and Iran center on deep distrust and hard policy questions and that the fatwa has little utility in addressing such difficult problems. Moreover, the fatwa has two technical deficiencies: first is the doctrine that it espouses only applies as long as the *mujtabid* (religious leader) who issued it lives, and second is the precedent established by Ayatollah Khomeini that the preservation of the state trumps everything else, including such fatwas. A political analyst questioned whether the fatwa in fact reflected Iran's actual political security strategy because of the challenges of its neighborhood that includes other nuclear and potential nuclear states. He asserted that the fatwa might just be an example of the Iran's lying so as to deceive the United States.

A third diplomat endorsed President Obama's stance that if the Supreme Leader's fatwa represents Iran's intent, then it should be possible to find ways for the fatwa to be verifiably implemented. Thus, he saw the fatwa as a potential basis for negotiation. He also advocated intensified diplomacy toward a settlement in which the West would lift sanctions and would accept limited enrichment by Iran in return for Iran agreeing to stringent monitoring and safeguards to assure its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.

No one objected to exploring the possibilities presented by the fatwa through Track Two diplomacy.

3) Middle East Peace Negotiations

From a diplomatic perspective, the two-state solution offers the fairest and best alternative to resolving the longstanding issues between the Israelis and the Palestinians. There is reason for hope because the Israelis by sheer demographics can have only two of three ends: a Jewish state, a democracy, and the land they now control between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. Prime Minister Rabin's choice of land for peace still remains the best chance

for Israel to live peaceably with its neighbors. For the Palestinians, they can achieve their goal of statehood by winning Israeli accommodations.

Despite these structural dynamics, the current objective circumstance is that neither the newly formed Israeli Government nor the Palestinians - split as they are between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas - appear in a position to compromise. Even though President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry have rededicated diplomatic energy to moving the peace negotiations forward, prospects for significant progress remain uncertain at best.

One key question is how religious cooperation in support of traditional diplomacy might change the atmosphere among both Israelis and Palestinians to help diplomatic efforts at negotiation gain momentum. Track Two efforts could include rebuilding under religious auspices many of the people-to-people contacts that have withered over the past several years. These include conversations among rabbis and imams about the possibilities of religious and social reconciliation. As Secretary Albright registered, pronouncements from such religious leaders could give a sorely needed boost to the renewed American initiative.

From the religious perspective, addressing the issues of justice, religious freedom, and tolerance for all people is critical. This is especially true for Palestinians and Israelis who are at an impasse in talks seeking to ensure that both parties have the right to have their own state where security is guaranteed and where the right of self determination is a given. Remedying this painful failure of the human will to find constructive ways forward over many decades must be a priority for both Palestinians and Israelis. This unresolved conflict is a major reason for the unrest and destabilization in the region and in the Islamic world. Track Two religious engagement supporting renewed diplomatic efforts must be undertaken by Israel, Palestinian leaders, and the United States.

Practical Observations from Religious Leaders and Diplomats

A presenter emphasized the need to act urgently to support the initiative of the Obama Administration to renew momentum in the Middle East peace negotiations based on a two-state solution. The range of actions includes not only mustering support within the United States but also internationally. In line with Albright's words, international religious voices could help legitimize the negotiations. The aim should be to improve the "political feasibility" of the peace process by strengthening moderate factions of the negotiating parties.

A diplomat added Secretary of State Kerry's mission is fragile and estimated that the administration has only some months before it loses steam. He called on religious leaders to invoke their moral authority and the support of their followings to influence the political leadership of the negotiation parties. A commenter on the proposal urged that religious leaders themselves must take the initiative in putting together an international statement or letter so that they would feel ownership of the effort.

Another remarked that a top-down approach is a tried and true way to add strong voices in support of the Administration's efforts. He urged in addition that religious leaders and diplomats consider middle-out and bottom-up approaches. Middle out would entail the creation of networks and coalitions of organizations working together to support a two-state solution. The bottom-up approach entails building grassroots support at the community level. This multi-tiered approach could include Track Two negotiations as well.

Reflections of the Working Group

The working group unanimously called for increased diplomatic and religious cooperation to support peace and to promote respect of basic human rights within and among religions. The religionization of politics and the politicization of religion, especially in the current dynamic environment mean that religion increasingly plays a role in diplomacy both as an opportunity for engagement and as a way to inspire a variety of actors. The task of diplomats and religious leaders collaborating with one another is made easier by the fact that many diplomats and political leaders are people of faith just as many clerics are diplomatic and politically astute. This human condition helps in the search for common interests and areas of common engagement.

Another central insight arising from the group's discussions is the fact that religious leaders play important roles in their communities in shaping attitudes and peoples' understanding of the world around them. Thus, consultation with religious leaders should be a routine aspect of diplomatic outreach. Nearly all participants in Doha repeatedly underscored the diplomatic skill most prized in discussions with religious leaders is careful listening.

Since the working group's meeting in Doha in June 2013, the White House and the Department of State have undertaken important initiatives that highlight their understanding of the need for diplomatic-religious collaboration. In Secretary Kerry's announcement of the establishment of Office of Faith-Based Initiatives in August, he instructed diplomats "to go out and engage religious leaders and faith-based communities in our day-to-day work. Build strong relationships with them and listen to their insights and understand the important contributions that they can make individually and that we can make together."³⁶ In short, the internal diplomatic dialogue to sensitize diplomats to the importance of religion to diplomacy is well underway.

The fear that religious considerations would somehow trump logic and national interests seems overstated, given the role religion has played as a motivating force in American foreign policy historically³⁷ and the fact that religion *de facto* looms large as a factor in international politics. More important is the *nature* of diplomatic engagement with religion. Critics argue that "When the United States officially engages actors abroad as 'religious', it sets standards that effectively bolster sects, denominations, and religious authorities that it has defined as benevolent, while marginal-

36. John Kerry, "Remarks at the Launch of the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives," Department of State, August 7, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/08/212781.htm>.

37. Michael B Oren, *Power, Faith and Fantasy: America in the Middle East: 1776 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 594. He notes in his book that:

The United States can be expected to pursue the traditional patterns of its Middle East involvement. Policymakers will press on with their civil mission as mediators and liberators in the area and strive for a *pax Americana*. American churches and evangelist groups will seek to save the region spiritually... The themes that evolved over the course of more than two centuries will continue to distinguish those ties, binding and animating them for generations.

izing less desirable counterparts.”³⁸ The risk is “the ‘operationalizing’ of religion” in a way that would “oversimplify complex questions of causation” with the consequences of aggravating sectarian tensions and creating less space for religious diversity as well as permitting “the United States to engineer religious affairs abroad.”³⁹

The answer to these points is that religious questions are no more complex than the political, cultural, economic, financial, and national security issues that form the heart of diplomatic business. It is nonetheless important to ensure diplomats have the expertise to do their job well and have the knowledge needed to tailor their engagement to circumstances.

Moreover, U.S. law, executive branch authorities, and American historical and cultural predilections will shape policy just as they do in the case in the traditional areas of diplomacy. All these policy determinants assign a high priority to the separation of state and religion based on the Establishment Clause of the Constitution, guarding against the feared effects. Shaun Casey, the head of the newly established State Department Office for Engagement with Faith-Based Communities has pledged that, “we will ensure that our engagement efforts will be consistent with the U.S. Constitution and other laws, both in terms of the spirit and letter of the law.” It is argued that while the Establishment Clause mandates a legal separation of church and state, it does not prohibit the government from engaging religious institutions and individuals. Rather, it prohibits the government from promoting one religion over any other religion, or promoting religion over non-religion. The Establishment Clause only applies to actions that are attributable to the government.⁴⁰

With regard to specific initiatives, the participants observed that inter-faith interventions can be effective because they bring to bear the strong core values uniting world faiths. While agreement in principle can be easy on generalities, implementation is more problematic. Intra-faith intervention holds promise in some cases. Still outside advice by coreligionists could complicate or even worsen a situation as well as offer the prospect of ameliorating it; all depends on the nature of advice and support as well as the circumstances. For diplomacy and religion, this means there is no universal rule about diplomatic religious cooperation across the dynamically changing Islamic world.

On Syria in particular, many participants supported a humanitarian ceasefire but acknowledged the argument that it could favor the Assad regime and put in place a dividing line not easily undone. A participant suggested inter-faith and intra-faith intervention could offer Track Two possibilities at some point, including on a humanitarian ceasefire.

On Iran, the election of Hassan Rouhani as president of Iran has brightened prospects at least temporarily for progress toward resolving US-Iranian tensions on nuclear issues. Track Two diplomacy could have a constructive role in this regard.

On Middle East peace negotiations, the means vary for the religions of our shared heritage to support the Middle East negotiations toward a two-state solution. Ideal would be inter-faith and intra-faith discussions to move toward a renewed Alexandria Declaration issued in 2002. Preparations for such a declaration would be arduous and cannot be done quickly; the inclusion

38. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, “What’s Wrong with Promoting Religious Freedom,” *Foreign Policy*, June 29, 2013, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/06/12/whats_wrong_with_promoting_religious_freedom.

39. *Ibid.*

40. John Kerry, “Remarks at the Launch of the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives,” Department of State, August 7, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/08/212781.htm>.

of a diplomatic element as in the Working Group in Doha could be instrumental.⁴¹

A worthy companion piece would be a declaration broadly subscribed to by a large number of religious organizations of the three faith communities that would stress both the enduring need and the importance of progress. That, too, would take some time. Given the urgency to improve the political feasibility of a two-state solution, initiatives such as statements by individual faiths or faith groups could give a more immediate boost.

The Doha session of the Working Group on Religion and Diplomacy constituted a breakthrough in bringing together senior diplomats and highly respected clerics to discuss the nexus between diplomacy and religion. Now that the groundwork has been laid, planning is underway for key players to convene again in the fall and for a high level gathering of religious leaders and scholars from the various faith traditions to meet in Rome in late 2014. The focus of both occasions would be Track Two diplomacy.

The Working Group on Diplomacy and Religion may in itself prove to be a form of Track Two diplomacy to further the more routine inclusion of religion in diplomatic considerations. A next step could be the addition of diplomats from several countries in future discussions to match the Working Group's geographical diversity on the religious side.

Secretary Kerry has noted that Gandhi called the world's religions beautiful flowers from the same garden. The Obama Administration has planted seeds to test that proposition. Like all gardens, it undoubtedly will need careful tending, some weeding and good weather if the flowers are to bloom.

41. These conversations a decade ago leading up to the signing of this landmark statement brought together six Israeli Jews, including four Rabbis, five Palestinian Muslim Sheikhs and Muftis, and five Palestinian Heads of Christian Churches meeting under the patronage of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Declaration called for all parties to "pray for true peace in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and declare our commitment to ending violence and bloodshed that denies the right of life and dignity" and asked for "political leaders of both peoples to work for a just, secure and durable solution in the spirit of the words of the Almighty and the Prophets." See United States Institute of Peace, "The Alexandria Process," <http://www.usip.org/programs/projects/alexandria-process> (18 September 2013).

About the Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World

The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World is a research initiative housed in the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. The Project's mission is to engage and inform policymakers, practitioners and the broader public on the changing dynamics within Muslim-majority countries and to advance relations between Americans and Muslim societies around the world.

To fulfill this mission, the Project sponsors a range of activities, research projects, and publications designed to educate, encourage frank dialogue, and build positive partnerships between the United States and Muslim states and communities around the world. The broader goals of the Project include:

- Exploring the multi-faceted nature of the United States' relationship with Muslim states and communities, including issues related to mutual misperceptions;
- Analyzing the social, economic and political dynamics in Muslim states and communities around the world;
- Identifying areas for shared endeavors between the United States and Muslim communities on issues of common concern.

To achieve these goals, the Project has several interlocking components:

- The U.S.-Islamic World Forum, which brings together key leaders in politics, business, media,

academia, and civil society from the United States and from Muslim societies in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. The forum also serves as a focal point for the Project's ongoing research and initiatives, providing the foundation for a range of complementary activities designed to enhance dialogue and impact.

- An Analysis Paper Series that provides high-quality research on key questions facing Muslim states and communities.
- Workshops, symposiums, and public and private discussions with government officials and other key stakeholders, focused on critical issues affecting the relationship;
- Special initiatives in targeted areas of demand. In the past these have included Arts and Culture, Science and Technology, and Religion and Diplomacy.

The Project's Steering Committee consists of Martin Indyk, Vice President and Director of Foreign Policy Studies (currently on leave); Tamara Cofman Wittes, Senior Fellow and Director of the Saban Center; William McCants, Fellow and Director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World; Bruce Riedel, Senior Fellow in the Saban Center; Shibley Telhami, Nonresident Senior Fellow in the Saban Center and Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland; and Salman Shaikh, Fellow and Director of the Brookings Doha Center.

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy

Charting the path to a Middle East at peace with itself and the world

Founded in 2002, the Saban Center for Middle East Policy brings together the most experienced policy minds working on the region, and provides policymakers and the public with objective, in-depth, and timely research and analysis. Our mission is to chart the path—political, economic, and social—to a Middle East at peace with itself and the world. Current research in the Center includes:

- What Makes Two States Possible?
- U.S. Strategy in a Changing Middle East
- Politics and Security in the Persian Gulf
- The Future of Counterterrorism
- U.S. Relations with the Islamic World
- Natural Resources and Conflict in the Middle East

The Saban Center was established on May 13, 2002 with an inaugural address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The Center was made possible by a generous grant from Haim and Cheryl Saban of Los Angeles, and is part of the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings. The Center upholds the Brookings values of Quality, Independence, and Impact.

The Center is home to the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, which convenes a major international conference each year in Doha and a range of activities to educate, foster frank dialogue, and build positive partnerships among U.S. and Islamic communities. The Center also houses the Brookings Doha Center in Doha, Qatar—home to three permanent scholars, visiting fellows, and a full range of policy-relevant conferences and meetings.

Signature Activities

The Saban Center organizes numerous events and conferences throughout the year, bringing together leading officials, scholars, business executives, academics, and journalists. Center events include:

- **The Saban Forum:** A high-level strategic dialogue on common challenges facing the United States and Israel.
- **The U.S.-Islamic World Forum:** A premier annual gathering of U.S. and Muslim world leaders to advance constructive partnerships, held in Doha or Washington.

The Saban Center's analysis is communicated through a variety of publications that serve as a resource for policymakers and their staffs. Center publications include:

- **Analysis Papers:** Four times a year, the Center publishes studies authored by its own scholars, as well as outside experts.
- **Middle East Memos:** The Saban Center's Middle East Memo series provides timely analysis of critical issues facing the region. The memos present offer insights and recommendations for policymakers.
- **Iran@Saban:** A vibrant blog focusing on politics in Iran, and policy towards Iran, written by Brookings experts.

Experts

Our team includes experienced and knowledgeable scholars, collectively offering decades of experience in government and in the field. Within the Center, a core group of experts conduct original research, bringing keen insight and fresh perspectives to bear on the critical challenges facing the Middle East today and on the policy choices facing American and regional decision makers. Their work is supplemented by nonresident scholars across the Middle East.

Saban Center Scholars:

Tamara Cofman Wittes, *Director, Senior Fellow*
 Daniel Byman, *Director of Research, Senior Fellow*
 Michael Doran, *Senior Fellow*
 Khaled Elgindy, *Fellow*
 Shadi Hamid, *Fellow*
 Suzanne Maloney, *Senior Fellow*
 William McCants, *Director, Project on U.S. Relations
 with the Islamic World, Fellow*
 Kenneth M. Pollack, *Senior Fellow*
 Natan Sachs, *Fellow*
 Salman Shaikh, *Fellow, Brookings Doha Center*

Nonresident Fellows:

Geneive Abdo, *Washington, D.C.*
 Akbar Ahmed, *Washington, D.C.*
 MJ Akbar, *New Delhi*
 Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Cairo*
 Stephen R. Grand, *Washington, D.C.*
 Hisham Hellyer, *Cairo*
 Mirette Mabrouk, *Washington, D.C.*
 Peter Mandaville, *Washington, D.C.*
 Alisa Rubin Peled, *Tel Aviv*
 Cynthia Schneider, *Washington, D.C.*
 Shibley Telhami, *College Park, MD*



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Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World
Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings
1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
www.brookings.edu/islamic-world