Thinking about the Role of Religion in Foreign Policy: A Framework for Analysis

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The article outlines a framework for the analysis of religion and foreign policy. Despite the increased attention to religion in international relations, questions remain. Particularly controversial, yet relatively unexplored, is the role of religion in the foreign policies of states. We extrapolate from theories in the fields of international relations and comparative politics to explore religion’s potential avenues of influence on foreign policy. There are potential tools of analysis in these fields, which can be fruitfully extended and applied to understand the role of religion in foreign policy. We propose a framework within which various causal pathways and mechanisms can be situated. We also show how contributions from the field of religion and politics might be used to frame theories and specify further hypotheses about religion and foreign policy. After identifying the main threads of these lines of research, we discuss how to apply them to the question of the role of religion in foreign policy and set out a new research agenda. We conclude that the potential of these theoretical approaches to the analysis of religion has not yet been exploited.

Religion’s influence in the interactions of states is one of the great and least understood security challenges of the twenty-first century. Religion’s role in international politics also presents an intellectual challenge to scholars of international relations and politics. While religion has emerged as a significant factor in some analyses of international relations, controversial and unexplored questions remain concerning the role of religion in the foreign policies of states (Huntington 1993; Albright 2006; Mead 2006; Mearsheimer and Walt 2006a, 2007; Haynes 2008; Hurd 2008; Inboden 2008; Shaffer 2006). Many empirical studies have attempted to assess the opinions that adherents of different faiths hold about foreign policy and to assess whether international conflicts since the end of the Cold War have occurred along religious lines (Jelen 1994; Russett, Oneal, and Cox 2000; Henderson and Tucker 2001; Chiozza 2002; Roeder 2003; Zunes 2005; Furia and Lucas 2006; Grim and Finke 2007; Barker, Hurwitz, and Nelson 2008; Haynes 2008).

Both sets of studies leave open questions of whether religion actually has a noticeable effect on foreign policy in some circumstances, and if so, how that

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effect is generated, and what are the possible mechanisms or means of religion’s influence? President Dwight D. Eisenhower, baptized Presbyterian while in office, was well known for having framed the Cold War in religious terms: “When God comes in, communism has to go” (in Inboden 2008:259). It has been assumed by most that Eisenhower meant “God” was a Christian God. Yet Eisenhower also reached out to the Muslim world and opposed the US’s Judeo-Christian allies of Israel, France, and Great Britain in the Suez Canal crisis (Inboden 2008:290–8). Was his faith irrelevant to his foreign policies, or did it lead him to see an expansive community of faith? George W. Bush, in his first speech after September 11, used religious rhetoric familiar to Christians but took pains to stress that the United States was not at war with Muslims or Islam (in Lincoln 2003:99-101). Studies have described both Bush and Jimmy Carter as having an evangelical presidential style, but the two had strikingly different foreign policies toward the Middle East (Daalder and Lindsay 2003; Guth 2004; Berggren and Rae 2006). Was that due to different interpretations of their faith, or different geopolitical circumstances, interest group pressures, and electoral conditions at the time of their presidencies?

The same puzzle also occurs in assessing religion’s role in the foreign policies of other states. Under the guidance of an Islamic party, Turkey in recent years seemed to have turned toward the West. Then, by some popular accounts it turned to the Middle East (Friedman 2010). Did its population become more Islamist in the past year, or are elected Turkish leaders responding to geopolitical circumstances and opportunities? Is a leader’s religion a reason (cause) of his or her foreign policy decision or a rhetorical rationalization used to persuade others? Is knowing the religious affiliation of a leader ever a predictor of which side a leader will take in a dispute that could have religious overtones (see Dunn 1984)? These examples illustrate the problems of causal inference from rhetorical argument or simple correlational models and the need to “unpack” the dimensional properties of religion rather than simply use the ID tag that names the religion and sees a possibly spurious correspondence between the religious label and a policy choice.

While there have been a number of studies on religion and foreign policy by several scholars, whose contributions we note throughout this essay, we suggest that the time is ripe for the development of a framework within which to better situate this research and assess progress in the field. In this essay, we survey theoretical perspectives from the fields of international relations and comparative politics and offer such a framework to understand the role of religion in foreign policy. We contend as well that contributions from the field of religion and politics may be used within this framework to specify further hypotheses about religion and foreign policy. We conclude from our review that these research possibilities have not yet been fully exploited.

Foreign policy is defined initially here simply as the formal policies of a state which affect various military, economic, humanitarian, social, and cultural dimensions of its relations with other states and nonstate actors. This focus excludes from consideration the role of religion in extraneous phenomena, such as rebellions, civil war, NGOs, transnational organizations (including terrorist), unless it is from the purview of a state’s foreign policy. Religion as the other half of our topic is also a multifaceted phenomenon (Bellin 2008). As Fox and Sandler (2004:176-7) suggest, religion plays various roles in peoples’ lives: it is a source of world views and values, as well as a source of identity and legitimacy, and is also “associated with formal institutions.” This conceptualization complements Bruce Lincoln’s definition of religion, which recognizes that religion is a set of collectively held spiritual beliefs articulated in a discourse, perpetuated and interpreted by institutions, communities, and associated practices (Lincoln 2003).
Much attention regarding the role of religion in international politics has been paid to religion as a set of beliefs or theology, an attribute of a culture, and a source of values (Huntington 1993; Norris and Inglehart 2004; Philpott 2007). When operationalized as a variable, it is typically measured by religious denomination or frequency of practice.\(^1\) If there is an organization attached, it is often as a large-scale, transnational actor such as the Catholic Church or as a covert terrorist network such as al Qaeda (Hanson 1987; Walt 2001/02; Hehir 2006). These views of religion may limit the effects that we see. A variety of theories of religion and politics also tell us we cannot ignore the role of religion as an attribute of individuals and communities, as an organized interest, and in its institutional connections with the state (Gill 1998; Gill and Keshavarzian 1999; Warner 2000; Ammerman 2003; Manza and Wright 2003; Kniss and Numrich 2007; Philpott 2007).

These varying manifestations of religion would seem to be significant in the arenas in which a state’s foreign policy is formulated, as individual leaders constitute the vortex and domestic organizations are the pathways through which the influence of religion often passes to influence political decisions—including those taken in the foreign policy domain. A country’s religious heritage may affect its overall orientation toward foreign policy and which countries are its more likely allies and enemies, but how that effect occurs, the extent of its impact, and how it interacts with existing domestic political structures and groups is as yet poorly understood. Fox and Sandler (2004) provide a general description of how religion might affect international relations, but many of their examples primarily address how religion affects domestic politics. Although they attribute some causal effects to religion in international affairs, their attention to foreign policy is limited. They analyze the extent to which interventions in domestic conflicts are performed by countries of the same religion (on the side of the same religion) and note that leaders can use commonly held religious understandings of their own population, as well as of other countries, to legitimate foreign policy choices and to build support. However, they do not explore more extensively the various mechanisms through which religion leads a state to intervene on behalf of coreligionists.

A variety of such studies have suggested that religion matters as a variable in understanding a state’s foreign policy. Our goal in this paper is to advance those efforts by shifting the focus from religion as a variable to encompass as well the mechanisms that generate or permit religion’s effects on foreign policy, what the limits of its role in these processes might be, under what conditions and through which mechanisms various aspects of religion exert more or less influence, to say nothing of developing methodologies for doing so. In sum, our goal is to create a framework for cumulative research on how religion might operate in specific foreign policy domains. Our assumption is that more attention to various mechanisms linking religion and foreign policy is warranted, to make theoretical progress in understanding the role of religion in foreign policy analysis.\(^2\)

We contend that insights and arguments from theories of international relations and comparative politics have the potential to be applied to the study of the role of religion in foreign policy as part of an emerging field of religion and politics. We apply these theoretical perspectives in this paper to show how the reasoning in these various explanations can work as theoretical solutions when applied to the puzzle of the role of religion in foreign policy. We want to show

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\(^1\) See the review piece by Fox (2001).

\(^2\) By mechanisms we mean interaction processes between variables in a complex social system of individuals, groups, institutions, and states, which generate foreign policies as outcomes. See Hedstrom and Swedberg (1998) for a discussion of social mechanisms and Axelrod and Cohen (1999) for the analysis of complex social systems.
the promising potential of several approaches to religion and politics, most especially those mapping with the aid of four general theories (realism, liberalism, institutionalism, and constructivism) the respective roles of power (geopolitical position) in realist theory, interests (parties) in liberal theory, institutions (states) in the “new institutionalism” theory, and ideas (religious heritage and culture) in constructivist theory.

We limit our theoretical survey to the main positivist schools of realism, liberalism, constructivism, and institutionalism in North American IR theory (Elman and Elman 2003) and exclude other schools of thought, such as the English school, various Marxist approaches, feminist IR theory, and hermeneutic or postmodern schools of thought (McGowan and Walker 1981; Alker and Biersteker 1984). These four approaches share some assumptions about the nature of causality in forming hypotheses about the relationships between cause and effect, which are to increase the likely commensurability of insights drawn from these various schools of thought. These mutual commitments allow us to bracket an extended consideration of methodological issues and focus on the identification of causal mechanisms that express hypotheses about the sources of foreign policy. We also do not treat these theories as rivals, nor are we going to test empirically any hypotheses. The value of our effort is primarily heuristic, the mapping of causal mechanisms identified by these theories and specifying hypotheses about religion and foreign policy that merit further investigation.

While these theoretical approaches are compatible with a mechanistic conception of causality as a process of interaction among variables that produces an effect, they do not emphasize the same type of causal mechanism. Structural realism emphasizes the distribution of power while structural constructivism privileges the configuration of cultural ideas and norms as “permissive causes,” structural mechanisms that permit certain foreign policy decisions as effects while excluding others (Waltz 1979; Wendt 1999). Liberalism identifies certain values and interests as goals while institutionalism prescribes state-based rules of behavior to shape and direct foreign policy decisions as effects (Keohane and Martin 2003; Moravcsik 2003). All of these theoretical perspectives assume a decision maker that internalizes and actually makes foreign policy decisions on the basis of these structural constraints (Ruggie 1983; Ashley 1984). The cognitive, motivational, and affective capacities of these agents would be the “efficient causes” that produce decisions occurring under these environmental constraints, and they may also vary by theory as we shall see below. It must also be stated that religion, in one or more of its varying manifestations, could be a necessary cause, a sufficient cause, or play yet a more complicated role in a set of causal relations (see Brady 2008:226–230; Mahoney 2008).

3 Elster (1998:45. Italics omitted) characterizes the idea of a causal mechanism as “intermediate between laws and descriptions... frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal patterns that are triggered under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences.” This conceptualization does not rule out that some causal relations may attain the status of laws within a theory while allowing for the search for causal mechanisms outside an explicit or fully specified theoretical context.

4 These IR theories distinguish collectively between two general types of causality, permissive and efficient causes (Waltz 1959), while disagreeing on the exact causal mechanism within these two categories that constrains or specifies foreign policy effects. More extended discussions of causality in IR theory and the social sciences are Waltz (1959); McGowan and Walker (1981); Little 1991, 1998; Hedstrom and Swedberg (1998); Yee 1996; Collier, Brady, and Seawright 2004; Jackson 2010). Other scholars note that analytical differences in causality and causal mechanism depend on correlation-based and process-based causal inferences (Collier et al. 2004). The former derives from the neo-Humean regularity approach, the latter on there being causal mechanisms and capacities to produce an effect (Brady 2008:226–32, 241–8; Collier, Sekhon, and Stark 2010). For an extensive discussion of theories of causality in social science, including counterfactual reasoning and experimental manipulation, see Brady (2008).
Theoretical Perspectives: Religion and Foreign Policy

The sources of foreign policy are a contested issue. To simplify, we group arguments into several categories: first, we identify realism, constructivism, liberalism, and institutionalism as general theoretical categories; second, we address more specific subcategories of geopolitical position, domestic culture or heritage, the nexus of public opinion, interest groups and parties, and the logic of state institutions; third, we consider the intervening impact of causal agents between these sources and foreign policy. To keep this tangle of theories, concepts, dimensions, and cases accessible and orderly, we adopt the convention of “mapping” their relationships with the aid of the example set by Smith (1968) and applied by Greenstein (1987) for the study of personality and politics. Our project also resonates with previous efforts to map the analytical terrain for studying foreign policy by Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin (1954) in foreign policy decision making, by Rosenau (1966) in comparative foreign policy analysis, and by McGowan and Walker (1981) in foreign economic policymaking.

Smith’s map consisted of six conceptual boxes containing dimensions extracted from each category of concepts. Some arrows identified causal paths by connecting dimensions within each box, and other arrows connected dimensions of one concept to dimensions associated with other concepts. We present a similar mapping strategy in Figure 1, outlining theoretically derived causal pathways as arrows leading to foreign policy outcomes. Our discussion outlines relationships and identifies processes as causal mechanisms along these pathways, which might be expected were we to consider systematically the role of religion in foreign policy and then introduce relevant features of religion into each of these causal pathways leading to foreign policy outcomes. To initiate this examination of linkages between religion and foreign policy, we begin by identifying shared properties of interest at the most immediate site of their interaction. These reciprocal relationships between agents and actions are in Box V and Box VI and represent the steering effects of leaders’ beliefs and intentions on foreign policy actions versus the learning effects of feedback from actions on those beliefs and intentions.

It follows that if religion is to have a local (direct and immediate) steering effect on foreign policy, its causal impact must be represented in the beliefs and intentions of the agents of foreign policy. If environmental feedback is to have a similar local learning effect on religion, it must alter or reinforce the beliefs and intentions of the agents. To reach these points of local impact between agent and action properties, however, it is also possible for religion’s influence on agents to originate in the culture of the society (Box IV) and travel through the

![Fig 1. A Macroscopic Map of Religion and Foreign Policy](image-url)
causal pathways linking groups (Box II) and institutions (Box III). The impact of feedback from the external environment to reach agents can also follow these pathways as well as the more circuitous route through the cultural matrix (Box IV) of the society.

We hypothesize that what is transmitted about religion along these pathways is information about the appropriate actions to take, based on religious beliefs about human nature, society, and the world. In other words, information from the worldview contained in a particular religion identifies relevant aspects of the political universe and provides guidance for ethical action in that environment. Depending on the receptivity of the agents and the energy in the transmission of this information, its message may be relevant and applicable to states as well as individuals. These possibilities raise two questions for investigation: what is the nature (content) of this information and how is it transmitted (with what force and via what channels)? The following analysis focuses first on the mechanisms of transmission and then on the content of the messages that link religion and foreign policy.

We employ IR theories to analyze mechanisms and distinguish different levels of resolution and magnification in examining our map with the aid of an optics metaphor (McGowan and Walker 1981). Using different theories, we specify known or predicted relationships among dimensions at different locations on the map. This step requires a lower resolution/higher magnification view of some locations (the trees) at the expense of an aerial, holistic overview (the forest) provided by the high-resolution/low-magnification map in Figure 1 above. In this figure, we can see the broad outlines of the map (concepts and relationships), but it reveals relatively little information about particular dimensions, the causal directions of the relationships between dimensions, or the actual mechanisms (processes) represented by the arrows.

The causal directions for the relationships specified in the macroscopic view in Figure 1 are the reciprocal arrows between (Box V) agents and (Box VI) foreign policy, the arrows linking (Box II) interests, (Box III) institutions, and (Box VI) foreign policy, and the arrows around the periphery anticipating relationships between (Box I) power and (Box IV) ideas/culture and the intervening relationships represented by interests and institutions. These postulated effects are based on theoretical arguments drawn from (I) realist, (IV) constructivist, and (II and III) liberal-institutional theories; the roles are not specified for particular variables contained within the concepts of power, ideas and culture, interests and institutions associated with these theories. Their specification in more detail is in the following discussion of these different IR theories and their causal mechanisms. The links between the theories and the boxed dimension(s), such as power, are not mutually exclusive. For instance, constructivists and liberals both have conceptions of power. Furthermore, we note that comparativists may see that some of their theoretical frameworks apply to these dimensions. The goal here is to see how these theoretical perspectives, with significant input from religion and politics theories, would conceptualize and hypothesize the role of religion in foreign policy.

Realism and Constructivism: Anarchy and Culture in the International System

Mainstream realist IR theory holds that because of the anarchic nature of international relations, in which there is no sovereign power that exercises authority over all others, each state does what it must to survive in its particular geopolitical position, namely, protect its territory and exercise sovereignty (Waltz 1979; Jervis 1999). Consequently, states are fundamentally concerned with key variables from the concepts in Box I of Figure 1, namely, power (both military and economic). They assess their relations with other states and take actions with or
against them based on a clear calculation of power and survival (Jervis 1978; Waltz 1979; Lake 1996). States, no matter their culture or religious heritage, face the same security dilemma in the form of threats because of power and geography. As Stephen Krasner (1993a, 21) writes, “The behavior of individual states, regardless of their domestic political characteristics, is constrained by their own capabilities and the distribution of power in the system as a whole.” Religion in any form in this view has little impact on the security dilemma and states’ responses to that dilemma.5

Yet scholars have noted that there are various ways for states to survive, to protect, and to enhance their power; other influences should not be so readily dismissed. One of these influences is “values,” which might be expressed in culture. States with common cultural values are argued to be less likely to go to war against each other (Kant 1939; Doyle 1986; Russett 1993). By extension, states with common religious values would be expected to be less likely to go to war with each other, as represented by the arrows directly connecting Boxes IV and V as well as them with Boxes I and IV.

As many readers will recognize, this argument is a restatement of Samuel P. Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis. Huntington (1993) famously argued that a country’s religious heritage determines its enemies and allies in the post-Cold War era. For Huntington, religion enters as a defining feature of the culture concept in Box IV of Figure 1. In turn, culture is part of the larger construct of “civilization” in Huntington’s argument, which determines cooperation or conflict between states. The security threat a state faces might be motivated by cultural differences, including religious ones. The approach assumes religion dominates and determines a country’s culture and “identity” and therefore specifies the state’s international allies and enemies. Although the Huntington thesis has been extensively tested and thoroughly critiqued, surprisingly few studies (including Huntington’s) have explicitly assessed the role of religion in “civilizational conflict” (Fox and Sandler 2004:118-125; Chiozza 2002; but see also Henderson 1998; Roeder 2003; Grim and Finke 2007).

Religion may have a role in international conflicts, even if it is not the determining or dominant factor. Extrapolating from a milder version of the “clash of civilizations” thesis, one might expect that religion could lead a country to relate differently to other countries depending on whether they have the same or a different religion. The causal mechanism in this argument postulates that countries of the same religion may have a significant level of ideological affinity. States with the same religion or religious heritage see that they have a common cultural bond, which fosters a common identity that mitigates the “us versus them” dynamic of the international system (Johnston 1995a; see also Philpott 2007, 518).

One hypothesis resulting from the “clash of civilizations” approach is that a common religious heritage may provide common norms which, in turn, might facilitate convergence on policy, including international treaties (Gehler and Kaiser 2003; Fox and Sandler 2004). This causal mechanism may also operate at the level of realpolitik: a state may use claims to a common heritage to foster alliances. While these dynamics could lead to peaceful, collaborative, or cooperative foreign policies, they could also lead to aggression if one state uses a common

5 Realism has a variety of interpretations, although fundamental to each is an emphasis on power and state survival. One can point to differences in Morgenthau, Carr, and Mearsheimer, for instance (Carr 1964; Morgenthau 1985; Mearsheimer 2001; Oren 2009). Space constraints prevent us from analyzing and extrapolating from all of its intellectual variants. We focus primarily on structure-oriented, neorealist analyses in this paper while omitting agent-centered, classical, and neoclassical variants of realism. The latter schools of realism share insights with domestic analyses and psychological analyses of agents by other theories discussed later in our essay, which cover this ground more extensively than realism.
religious background to justify taking over another, or to assist foreign insurgencies and civil wars. For countries of different religions, conversely, the lack of ideological affinity may make cooperation more difficult. At the level of realpolitik, religious differences may be used instrumentally as one justification for aggression or noncooperation with another or to fund foreign insurgencies or civil wars.

Religion is typically viewed as one aspect of culture, and thus in the international relations literature its influence is theorized in the context of culture. The main proponents of culture as a variable in international relations have been (Box IV) constructivist theorists who argue that the very essence of a state is its identity, which is derived from its culture (Wendt 1992; Finnemore 1996). The religion embedded in a country's national identity, which shaped its institutions, would be expected to shape how that country defines its foreign policy interests. State actions in the international arena are derived from that identity: "The identity of a state implies its preferences and consequent actions" (Hopf 1998:175). If states react similarly to similar threats and other foreign policy situations regardless of identity or culture, it is because the "background of social/discursive practices and meanings which make possible the practices as well as the social actors themselves" has been universalized in the system of international states (Doty 1993:298). Although this thesis is a decided advance upon essentializing arguments, such as Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis, though it still needs a means of understanding how culture or identity affects policy in different issue domains. Some argue that religious norms are too broad and vague to account for policy specificities if one simply asserts, like Huntington, that cultures or civilizations based on the same world religion have a similar set of norms (Katzenstein 1996).

A narrower version of the constructivist approach would contend that culture can provide "the logic through which interests are rationalized and prioritized" (Ansari 2006:259). If religion is one aspect of culture, it may contribute to that logic because religions are characterized by a system of beliefs, norms, and practices that provide a guide to right living (Lincoln 2003). Religions have systems of moral authority that rationalize and prioritize certain interests while refuting and dismissing others. To add more specificity, one might further hypothesize that if a religion is regarded as an integral part of the state's identity and if particular mechanisms are present, governments are more likely to take religion into account in formulating foreign policy. If the state's identity has been defined as strictly secular, as in France, it is much less likely that religious factors will affect foreign policy.

Recent works on religion and politics have argued that religions cannot be analyzed as monolithic entities. Any religion (especially the major world religions) is instead comprised of myriad interpretations, organizational structures, communities, and practices (Lincoln 2003; Hehir 2006; Philpott and Shah 2006; Warner and Wenner 2006; Collins 2007; Kniss and Numrich 2007). When Max Weber wrote of the "practical religion of the converted," he noted that religions vary in their expression across countries and that religious practices vary markedly within countries (Laitin 1986). Thus, an effort to assess the influence of religion on foreign policy by searching for the effects of a monolithic religion in a particular case, for example, "Islam and the foreign policy of Pakistan," might miss differences within Islam and their varied potential influences on the foreign policy of Pakistan. In addition, Pakistan's complex religious culture likely interacts with other aspects of its culture and political history. Emphasizing religion as a key factor in foreign policy, Walter Russell Mead (2006) argues that the Christian religious heritage is important in the United States, precisely because that heritage has bequeathed several politically important strands of Protestant Christianity (mainline, fundamentalist, evangelical) to American culture. To
research the role of religion in US foreign policy, therefore, one needs to start by differentiating between the strands and understanding their different implications for attitudes toward foreign policy.

Another constructivist argument challenges the simple or nonexistent role of religion in realist international relations theory. It posits that the whole arena for foreign policy has been defined to be secular; hence, the traditional positivist research agenda will find inevitably that religion does not have any or much influence (Hurd 2004, 2006, 2008). In other words, religion’s role is limited in foreign policy because the international system is based on the Westphalian secular state. However, Daniel Philpott (2000) argues that the Protestant Reformation gave rise to the system of sovereign statehood, which characterizes much of international politics, lending credence to Elizabeth Shakman Hurd’s (2004, 2008) claim that the system is premised on a false secularity. That is to say, secularism is a tenet derived from religion—the Protestant Reformation.

The Protestant Reformation detached religious authority from state (secular) authority. Indeed, it defined the state as an entity distinct from theology and from religious authority and institutions. Philpott argues that without such a move, the Treaty of Westphalia and the resulting system of states would not have been possible. The Reformation’s definition of a state and its authority underlies a system that accepted that matters of religion were internal affairs of state. Hurd and Philpott emphasize with constructivists the historical contingency of the state system. Hurd then argues that the state system, which privileges the secular in international relations, is not morally superior or otherwise better than some other system that conceivably could have evolved were it not for haphazard historical events. Its secularism is also the expression of the religious norm in the Protestant Reformation of locating authority at the local level of agents (individuals or states) rather than in a universal organization such as a catholic, that is, universal, church or a Holy Roman Empire (Krasner 1993b, 1999; Philpott 2001; Carlson and Owen 2003).

Combined with the argument of other IR theorists, that shared ideas can be “encased” by institutions, thus structuring the policy arena and privileging those ideas embedded in institutions (Sikkink 1991; Goldstein 1988), the Hurd and Philpott perspective is a powerful reminder that we may not be seeing much religion in foreign policy because it has been defined out of the system as a legitimate, sovereign force. As Hurd reasons about the United States, “secularist authority is an influential part of the socio-cultural context within which US foreign policy is formulated” (Hurd 2008:106). Secularism, based on particular histories and understandings of religion and coming under different forms, is embedded in the international system and in national identities that suffuse the foreign policy bureaucracy, the military, and foreign policymakers’ decisions.

Liberalism: Ideas, Interests, and Institutions

Because religion can be said to have as one defining feature a set of ideas (theology), a key place to think about the role of religion in foreign policy is to consider the role of ideas within institutions. This perspective is distinct from a constructivist approach emphasizing the role of culture, as the latter tends to argue that culture includes symbols, rituals of meaning, norms, and other social practices. As conceived by a variant of liberal IR theory, ideas operate in a more limited way, providing a set of concepts or beliefs about a political issue area, such as foreign policy (Goldstein and Keohane 1993a:3). Scholarship on the role of ideas in foreign policy turns on the point that, even in traditional security areas such as war, states make choices. Collectively held ideas, ideas pushed by specific interest groups or coalitions (parties) with access to policymakers, and the ideas of leaders influence those choices (Goldstein and Keohane 1993b; Yee
1996; Legro 2005). Precisely because the realist view of the world holds that the international system is anarchic, thus characterized by high uncertainty and complexity, states and their policymakers cannot make strictly rational judgments. Even if states and leaders are rational, the situations they face are complex and uncertain.

As Douglass North argues, under such circumstances “substantive rationality results do not hold. One has to model the decision maker as holding a mental model” (quoted in Legro 2005:26; see North 1999:248–50; Malici 2008b). The costs and benefits of policies and actions can vary, depending on the conceptual or ideational lens through which they are viewed or the ideational scale on which they are weighed. Constructivists agree and argue that ideas construct “both identities and interests” (Houghton 2007:29), which is why elements of both liberal and constructivist theory overlap. Contemporary liberal theory in IR posits that states pursue preferences and ideals derived from domestic political considerations and constrained by domestic and international institutions, with the ideational variant of the theory focusing on “domestic social identities and values as a basic determinant of state preferences” and thus of foreign policy (Moravcsik 2003:168). Comparativists might note that IR seems to have “discovered” domestic politics. IR theorists might counter that while preferences and ideals are domestically derived, relations in the international system depend on the distribution of preferences and values across states and how states can interact with other states to reach their goals. To investigate religion’s role in foreign policy, the analysis must include specification of religion’s role in creating identities and values.

To start, one should ask what does it mean for religion to be an idea? First, it would mean that religion is the theological doctrine, which proclaims and describes the religion and “provides guidance for living a moral life consistent with the religious conceptualizations” (Laitin 1986:25). It makes “truth claims” based on an understanding of a “transcendent authority” (Lincoln 2003:5-6). Carried over to religion in foreign policy, a basic ideational approach would suggest that different religions—or (more precisely) different religious groups practicing their version of a religion—will have different ideas about goals and assign different weights to trade-offs on the means/ends scale to reach those goals (Warner 2000; Kniss and Numrich 2007; Elman 2008). Second, as Philpott (2007:507) argues, it would mean that the religion’s political theology describes what it sees as “legitimate political authority,” answering questions about who may hold power: “To what degree ought the state to promote faith? What is justice? What is the right relationship between religious authorities and the state?” Extended to foreign policy, such an approach would focus on the ideas that the religion might have about who or what constitute enemies of the state or the religion or its religious followers, and what the legitimate range of actions and purposes of state power vis-à-vis other states are.

Constructivists might go further to argue that the foreign policy arena and all participants in foreign policy-making would be influenced by shared beliefs as a subset of ideas about the “national interest” (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001). Thus, to the extent that religion is a part of those shared beliefs, it will affect foreign policy. This approach “requires an analysis of the ideational causal mechanisms or capacities that render the meanings of ideas and beliefs compelling to actors” (Yee 1996:102), as well as an explication of the doctrine and practices of the entities in question. Dimensions of interests, institutions, agents, and even power must be understood in terms of the constitutive capacity of religious ideas.

Houghton (2007) notes that the potential of ideas to have causal influence in foreign policy had been articulated much earlier by Snyder et al. (1954). A religion has vocabularies and concepts which “proscribe and prescribe speech” and
thus how policies are formulated, and even whether they can be thought of to be formulated (Yee 1996:95). The counterpoint to an emphasis on ideas is that, “Ideas have not made possible alternatives that did not previously exist; they legitimated political practices that were already facts on the ground” (Krasner 1993b:238). In the significant case of the Westphalian state system, however, Philippon (2000) argues to the contrary that the idea of such an arrangement preceded the “facts on the ground.” Shared social identities, based on a common idea, here religious, would shape a state’s foreign policy. The ways the policies and actions of states and other international actors are interpreted by national policy-makers are constrained and formed by those shared understandings.

The preceding account of the relationship between religion and foreign policy is a relatively “thin” account, fueled by the concepts of power and ideas, without specifying the mechanisms that encapsulate and channel these influences in politics. In this section we examine the impact of ideas, interests and institutions embodied by interest groups, organized religions, and political parties or movements in the society and by organizations and institutions of the state, which IR scholars would recognize as variants of republican liberal theory, and comparativists as interest group politics and the new institutionalism (Hall 1986; Baumgartner and Leech 1998; Immergut 1998; Warner 2000; Moravcsik 2003; Gourevitch and Shinn 2005; Schmidt 2008). These levels of analysis are the domestic locations for mechanisms, which transmit ideas and power within the architecture of their respective structures.

We begin by investigating the impact of the attitudes and opinions of the mass public on policymakers’ choices. Doing so moves us to considerations of (Box II) domestic-level sources of foreign policy emphasized by liberal IR theory (Doyle 1986; Moravcsik 2003). Scholars have debated whether publics generally have strong opinions about foreign policy and by extension whether different religious denominations have different opinions about the same subject—and if so, what those views are (Jelen 1994; Nelsen, Guth, and Fraser 2001; Furia and Lucas 2006; Baumgartner, Francis, and Morris 2008; Froese and Mencken 2009; Rosenson, Oldmixon, and Wald 2009). Barker et al. (2008:307) find that those in the United States who adhere to a Christian “messianic militarist” belief are more likely to have hawkish attitudes on foreign policy and that “as belief in the authority in the Bible increases, so does the perceived electoral salience of foreign policy issues, relative to domestic issues.” Some recent studies have gone a step further and tried to examine how public opinion would impact policymakers’ decisions (Aldrich, Gelpi, Feaver, Reifler, and Thompson Sharp 2006; Lai and Slater 2006; Baum and Potter 2008). Findings are mixed, though they tend to show that the institutional context filters how public opinion affects leaders. Aldrich et al. (2006:496) conclude that public opinion affects US foreign policy through the electoral and party system.

Scholars who emphasize (Box III) institutions in international relations and domestic politics argue that ideas do not simply infuse the spirit of the culture or the collectively held national understandings and then result in policy. Instead, there is a complex process in which the differential power of competing societal groups and the institutional structures of a state’s political system affect whether and how ideas affect foreign policy (Katzenstein 1978; Gourevitch 1986; Milner 1997). Ideas must have an “organizational means of expression” to “acquire force” (Hall 1986:280; see Yee 1996:92-94). The point “is not to show that ideas ‘trump’ other traditional factors—specifically power or interest groups—in explaining foreign policy change and continuity, but instead to make sense of how ideas interact with other factors in specific ways to cause outcomes” (Legro 2005:13; italics in original). Extending this approach to the study of religion and the foreign policies of states, one would need to focus on the institutional features of a religion and its connections with the state, particularly in the
processes by which a state formulates its foreign policy (Philpott and Shah 2006; Warner and Wenner 2006; Warner 2000; Kalyvas 2000; Rakel 2007).

In line with this view, scholars of foreign economic policy argue that “political institutions determine how power over decision-making is allocated among national actors” (Milner 1997:99; Naoi 2009; see also Elman 1995; McGowan and Walker 1981). Others have examined whether some interest groups have had more influence than others (Jacobs and Page 2005; Zunes 2005; Mearsheimer and Walt 2006a, 2007). Thus, foreign policy is constituted through an institutionally constrained struggle between different groups. Policymakers can exploit the positions of their domestic constituency to achieve their aims (Moravcsik 1993:24–7; Putnam 1988; Stinnett 2007), although the extent to which they can, depends on what kind of political system they are leading (Lai and Slater 2006) and whether domestic events are undermining their authority (Fravel 2005).

Scholars who have studied public opinion and foreign policy tend to agree that in order for public opinion to have an impact on foreign policy, it needs an institutional channel or outlet. Therefore, we need to analyze how institutions affect whether religion has an impact on foreign policy. Indeed, informed by the religion and politics literature on religious beliefs, institutions and their effect on domestic politics, we would expect that political institutions, as well as the organizational structure and mobilizational capacities of religious institutions, affect whether and how religion influences foreign policy formation (Jelen 1991; Jelen and Wilcox 2002; Yavuz 2003; Wald, Silverman, and Fridy 2005; Warner and Wenner 2006; Freedman 2009). There are a number of possible institutional effects. One approach emphasizes the role of institutional differentiation between religion and state power in understanding the role of religion in politics. This approach focuses on the legal arrangements governing “how religion and political authority are related” (Philpott 2007:505) and would be familiar to scholars who study “church-state” arrangements and their effects on issues ranging from the boundaries between sacred and secular, the place of religion in public life (Casanova 1994), to accommodation of minority religions (Fetzer and Soper 2005; Fox 2008; Kuru 2008). All other things being equal, the overt influence of a religion in a state’s foreign policy may be lower in a state in which there is high differentiation through a formal, legal separation of religious and state authority as in France or Turkey. This claim is not a statement of fact, but rather a proposition generated from insights in the religion and politics literature.

Another institutional aspect is the structure of the political system. Extrapolating to foreign policy, one would surmise that democratic political systems would give religion the opportunity to be influential in foreign policy. Even though states operate in the international system of states, they have to deal with the specificities of their domestic populations, and the domestic factor is amplified in democratic systems (Evans et al. 1993; Milner 1997; Jacobs and Page 2005). Political structures would mediate such factors as the relation of religion to the legitimacy of the state, the nature of the religious heritage, the religiosity of the population, religiously informed public opinion, and the presence of mobilized religious groups. For instance, in a democracy if the electoral system is proportional, small, single-issue parties may be able to win seats in the legislature. If they become critical to the formation of coalition governments and they have strong preferences, they may steer foreign policy in their direction (Elman and Warner 2008; Elman 2008; see Sprecher and DeRouen 2005; Kaarbo and Beasley 2008). If such a party has a religious base and ideology, the preferences of organized religious minorities may be taken into consideration as a state formulates its foreign policy in a particular issue area.

If the political system is structured such that organized interests have a formal role in foreign policy (Haynes 2008), or are part of the “selectorate” of the
regime (those groups and/or individuals who choose the state’s leadership; Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, and Morrow 2003), one might expect to find religious interests expressed in foreign policy. To the extent that such interests must be catered to by the regime, it may be possible to appease them with patronage or domestic policies (Elman and Warner 2008). Authoritarian regimes are also constrained, to a lesser extent, by their constituencies (Lai and Slater 2006). Countries may have organized religious interests present in representative institutions, which by their power as voters or active societal groups attempt to influence foreign policy. They are more likely to succeed where the states are relatively unstable and very dependent on societal forces such as organized religions (Gill and Keshavarzian 1999; Gill 2008). Thus, for instance, an institutional perspective would expect the impact of organized religious groups to be attenuated by a strong, secular military, by the powers and interests of the head of government/state, and by the economic and political-military (geopolitical) vulnerabilities of the country.

This institutional approach directs attention to the fact that religious beliefs are typically carried and promoted by organized religions and that these religious organizations have seemingly secular interests, namely in organizational maintenance and possibly expansion, which affect their strategies vis-à-vis state institutions. Organized religions often have interests, which force them to negotiate, pressure, or compete with political authorities to further their organizational survival and advance their moral project. These interests may compromise or seem to contradict the organization’s espoused religious beliefs or even lead to changes in doctrine (Kalyvas 1996; Gill 1998; Lu 2008:137-53; Trejo 2009). In short, religion needs structural mechanisms to influence foreign policy. Vague cultural identities must be organized and galvanized by societal and political institutions and leaders. As Jelen and Wilcox (2002:315) remind us, “There is no necessary connection between a nation’s religious composition and the relationship of church and state.” Protestant United States, Catholic France, and Muslim Turkey have legal and institutional separation of religion and state; Protestant Britain, Catholic Ireland and Muslim Pakistan do not. This is not to deny the emphasis Scott M. Thomas and others give to the way that “religion constitutes the very identity of politically influential social movements” (Philpott 2009:196; Thomas 2005). It is to note that while religion can constitute the very being of a social movement or interest group, its political influence on foreign policy may be constrained or facilitated by institutional structures, material needs, and institutional relationships.

Agent-Based Theory: Personalities and Beliefs in the International System

Political psychologist Margaret Hermann moves the institutional argument inside the state apparatus, arguing that the various international and domestic factors which affect foreign policy “are necessarily channeled through the political apparatus of a government that identifies, decides, and implements foreign policy” (Hermann 2001:47; see also Keohane and Martin 2003). Foreign policy is ultimately configured by a set of decision units within government itself. Focusing on the decision-making process within the state brings attention to the various ways religion might be present within a state’s foreign policy decision-making apparatus, as well as its influence within the belief systems of the people who actually make the decisions. However, now is not the time to enter into or attempt to settle the debate about the relative explanatory power of structure.

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*See, for instance, the debate about the role of the “Israel lobby” in US policy toward Israel and the Middle East (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006a,b, 2009; Lieberman 2009a,b). An analysis of this debate and specific pathways of the influence of certain interests groups on US foreign policy is beyond the scope of this essay.*
versus agency, that is, the structure of the international or domestic system versus
the individual, but rather to show how a foreign policy analysis assessing the role
of religion might consider its influence on leaders and policies (Greenstein
1987; Wendt 1987; Carlsnaes 1992). It is sufficient for our purposes to note that
foreign policy decisions are ultimately made by individuals in leadership posi-
tions, suggesting that obvious and important avenues of research in the role of
religion in foreign policy are the beliefs of leaders.

Leadership decisions have been rigorously analyzed in the operational code lit-
terature, which suggests that the philosophical and instrumental beliefs of leaders
do systematically affect foreign policy decisions (Kaarbo 1997; Schafer and
Walker 2006). Thus, one would expect that if religious beliefs are embedded in
a leader’s operational code, then religion would influence foreign policy. While
the influence of the religious beliefs of leaders is constrained by state structures,
considerations of geopolitical forces and domestic political interests, the religious
beliefs of leaders can be influential in shaping leadership style (how dogmatic or
pragmatic a policy might be) and in directing leadership attention (how salient
or irrelevant a particular historical relationship or event may become).

It is also plausible that leaders could activate some elements of religion or be
forced to incorporate them (Mead 2006). A leader’s beliefs may influence for-

gien policy to the extent that they include a religiously informed answer to ques-
tions such as, “Is the political future predictable?” “What is the best approach for
selecting goals for political action?” (Malici 2006:42). The related literature
regarding the strategic culture of states focuses on leaders’ beliefs as cultural
(or here, religious) constructs (Johnston 1995a,b; Feng 2007). Perhaps the
beliefs of the foreign policy elite (the decision makers) inhere in “a vision of
the nation’s role in world affairs that corresponds to deep, cultural beliefs about
the nation” (Hudson 1999:769). The strong version of this cultural argument
holds that foreign policy elites become leaders only because they do reflect the
deep-seated beliefs of the nation.

While it would be an injustice to the strategic culture literature to argue that it
is merely a cross between leaders’ operational codes and cultural-ideationist
approaches, this literature does look at the systematic belief systems of policy-
makers and whether there exists a particular culture of beliefs about state strat-
egy (Johnston 1995a,b, 1999; Gray 1999; Poore 2003; Feng 2007). To extend
such an approach to the role of religion in foreign policy requires a research
design that can assess whether or to what extent the state’s strategic culture is
informed by religion and whether that culture “limits the behavioral choices
regarding the efficacy of military force or any form of political action in inter-
state political affairs” (Malici 2006:40; see also Johnston 1995a).

A state’s strategic culture becomes the subset of role identities in the culture
of a society that defines power relations between self and other in the domain of
world politics. If the origins of these identities can be traced back to religious
roots, then it is possible to say that religion affects foreign policy by incubating
and transmitting role identities that govern the foreign policy decisions of elites
in the society’s institutions. Existing leaders may either learn or teach these iden-
tities via communication with the public or spread them to others. New leaders
may bring them along into social or political institutions in a transfer of power
and leadership through elections, coups, revolutions, or foreign occupation.
Their interpretations and calculations in the exercise of power may be affected
by the nature and extent of their reliance upon organized religious groups.

Conclusion

What have we learned from this tour of the research horizons in Foreign Policy
Analysis, International Relations, and Comparative Politics, which can inform a
coherent research agenda focused on religion and foreign policy? To address this question and bring our investigation full circle, we revisit Figure 1 and the optics metaphor that informs it. We offer a mesoscopic view of our framework as a potentially optimum strategy for the study of religion and foreign policy in the form of different research triangles formed by the various nodes (boxes) in Figure 1. The mesoscopic level of analysis, called "the middle way" by natural scientists, focuses and works at an intermediate level of analysis between the microscopic levels of local individuals or atoms and the macroscopic levels of global physical or social systems (Laughlin, Pines, Schmalian, Stojkovic, and Wolynes 2000; Lozano, Arenas, and Sánchez 2008). It is an approach compatible with complex adaptive systems analysis, which identifies potential subsystems within a larger global system that is "nearly decomposable," that is, its elements are all related but some much more strongly than others (Simon 1973; Miller and Page 2007). A mesoscopic approach attempts to identify such clusters of strongly related elements for more intensive analysis and to search for emergent properties or "system effects" associated with the kinds of local causal processes within each subsystem (Jervis 1997; Axelrod and Cohen 1999; Mitchell 2009).

We suggest that a mesoscopic approach, which reconceptualizes the map more specifically in Figure 1 as the map for a complex system or network, will allow teams of scholars to collaborate more easily for two reasons. One reason is that a mesoscopic view of the highly complex relations in Figure 1 decomposes them into simpler and more manageable sets of relations, which is consistent with what is known about the logic of turning "ill-structured" problems into "well-structured" problems for representation and solution (Newell and Simon 1972; Voss 1998). The other reason is that a mesoscopic, subsystemic approach may limit the range of likely causal mechanisms in the solution of problems to ones with isomorphic logical assumptions and commensurable empirical characteristics that permit relatively straightforward constructions of theoretical explanations with a common language and set of assumptions (Hanrieder 1967; Lakatos 1970; Cummins 1983; Ball 1987; Elman and Elman 2003).

What are the potential mesoscopic systems for investigation in Figure 1 and which ones are likely to share common logical and empirical methodological assumptions about how to conceptualize religion, foreign policy, and their causal connections? Religion’s influence on foreign policy can be conceptualized as elements of our map that form two large research triangles: an internal (domestic) triangle of Ideas, Interests, and Institutions and another external (foreign) triangle of Power, Interests, and Institutions. In the language of network theory for complex systems, the "hub" of each triangle is the pair of "high degree" nodes formed by Foreign Policy (VI) as decisions made by Agents (V) as leaders. Hubs are nodes in a network that have a high degree (greater number) of direct (immediate) links with other nodes (elements) in a system of interactions (Mitchell 2009:235). As Melanie Mitchell (2009:234) states, "In simplest terms, a network is a collection of \textit{nodes} connected by \textit{links}. Nodes correspond to the individuals in a network (for example, neurons, Web sites, people) and links to the connections between them (for example, synapses, Web hyperlinks, social relationships)."

The two domestic and foreign triangles divide into several smaller triangles (subsystems or networks) with Agents as one of the points on each triangle. In this conceptualization, the agents of a state become the hub of a social and geopolitical network of complex adaptive subsystems within a larger social system, which is embedded in a regional system of states undifferentiated in Figure 1 and represented by the Power node (I) in this figure. The various research triangles in Figure 1 function as mesoscopic heuristics for identifying basic questions about Religion and Foreign Policy.

We have explored several of these basic questions and suggested some hypothetical answers during the preceding discussion in this essay. The timescale
and space-scale of observations for the interaction of variables in these meso-
scopic research triangles can be disaggregated spatially and temporally either
to microscopic research triangles formed by Agents (V), Foreign Policy (VI),
and any one of the other nodes in Figure 1 or aggregated spatially and tempo-
rally into macroscopic research triangles potentially connected as larger quad-
rangles and other higher-order configurations. It is possible to focus more
minutely on episodic stimulus-response chains of behavior that represent steer-
ing and learning processes between individuals inside or between these various
nodes. It is feasible as well to look for broader and gradual secular trends in
the interactions inside states, between states, or among other large social systems
within a region, such as alliances, transnational organizations, or regional
institutions.

More generally, a focus on the exercise of religious power is a theme that con-
nects these possible relationships. Depending on the particular triangular system
of interest in Figure 1 and the spatial-temporal scales of aggregation or disaggre-
gation, religious power has a different conceptualization as a causal mechanism.
One general conceptualization is that religion is structure-oriented, a systemic
cause that limits, selects, reproduces, or mediates the range of foreign policy
decisions by agents. This type of cause may be either material or ideational,
respectively such as power in the realist school, interests in the liberal school,
rules in the institutionalist school, or ideas in the constructivist school of IR the-
ory. The other general conceptualization is agent-centered, that is, religion is
manifested in the belief systems and actions of individuals who form the mass
public or who lead interest groups and institutions. These agents act as an
efficient cause that transforms, specifies, or motivates particular foreign policy
decisions (McGowan and Walker 1981; Goldstein and Keohane 1995a; Yee
1996). These causal distinctions are compatible with religion as both the base of
social power and its exercise, conceptualized in the first instance as a back-
ground condition that constrains choices by agents within a system and in the
second instance as a force that directs choices in which agents exercise control
over others in social contexts (French and Raven 1959; Bachrach and Baratz
1962; McClelland 1966; Wright 1978; Baldwin 1989).

These possibilities can take several forms, morphing into different shapes
depending on the location in Figure 1. Ideas (IV) in a religion have the “power
to name,” that is, to cast individuals, groups, or organizations into identities as
friends, collaborators, rivals, or enemies and attribute scripts to self or others
that create expectations about their behavior (Walker 2004; see also Doty 1993;
Wendt 1999; Cady 2008). Interests (II) are often associated with identities so that
ideas translate into interests associated with identities (Wendt 1999). Ideas
become institutionalized when the occupants of existing Institutions (III) politi-
cize the roles defined by religious ideas by taking them on as political identities.
This process of role-taking transmits simultaneously the corresponding interests
associated with the identities. Collectively, these processes have a “framing
effect” that either passively constrains or actively directs the conduct of Foreign
Policy (VI), depending on the capacities of Agents (V) to exercise leadership at
the microscopic level of analysis in different historical situations within a particu-
lar research triangle in Figure 1 (Stoessinger 1979; Greenstein 1987).

In turn, the dyads formed by self and other in regional politics are affected by
the roles assigned to them by religious Ideas (IV) in their discursive space. This
pattern of symbolic interaction between them constrains and directs their behav-
ior toward one another and the pattern of strategic interaction between them,
conditioned as well by the distribution of Power (I) between them (Wendt 1999;
Walker 2004, 2007; Malici 2008a). If their behavior is conceptualized as the exer-
cise of positive and negative sanctions toward one another, then this dynamic is
a representation of foreign policy behavior literally as “power politics,” that is,
the exercise of power between states conditioned by the distribution of power between them (McClelland 1966; Baldwin 1989).

As this survey of theoretical approaches to the study of foreign policy has shown, there is a vast toolkit to be applied fruitfully to the systematic study of foreign policy. Insights from these theories may enable us to do what most critically needs to be performed, namely, building empirically relevant theories of foreign policy and linking them to theories of religion, to understand the role of religion in the foreign policies of states (Walker 2003; see also Laudan 1977). Our essay advances these efforts by proposing a framework for creating and producing theoretically grounded and methodologically sophisticated research designs, which can generate empirically testable research and causal inferences and can foster future intellectual aspirations to be exploited in at least three ways.

First, our map of research networks aspires to link the research of scholars from a variety of disciplines to open a new domain of inquiry and enable us to assess the conditions under which religion affects foreign policy, through what mechanisms, and with what range and types of effects. Second, its triangular heuristics undertake to hone theories of the sources of foreign policy and to integrate methodologies for assessing foreign policy and studying the role of religion in foreign policy and international relations. Third, the synergistic intersection of these internal and external triangles as research networks pushes us more broadly to develop better theories of religion and politics.

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Thinking about the Role of Religion in Foreign Policy


