

BACKGROUND

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Minding the “God Gap”: ISIS’ Genocide of Religious Minorities and American Statecraft

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Abstract

The swift rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq presented the United States with yet another threat from a religiously motivated actor—yet American leaders struggled to “know the enemy.” American leaders have historically secularized the motives and commitments of religious actors, which weakens our ability to “know the enemy.” At the same time, secular political assumptions have limited our capacity to engage religious actors in the work of promoting religious freedom and pluralism. In the future, U.S. attempts to understand religious actors should treat the sincerity of religious commitments with due gravity. Doing so enhances our ability to distinguish friend from foe and helps anticipate hostile actions, as well as find avenues of cooperation in our pursuit of freedom, security, and peace.

What can the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham’s (ISIS’) genocide of religious minorities tell us about what the role of religion in statecraft should be? In 2010, four years before ISIS began committing genocide, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs issued a prescient warning about a deficiency in American foreign policy. A bipartisan task force of experts in religion and diplomacy described American foreign policy as “handicapped by a narrow, ill-informed[,] and ‘uncompromising Western secularism’ that feeds religious extremism, threatens traditional cultures and fails to encourage religious groups that promote peace and human rights.”¹ The task force concluded that religious actors would “not only continue to present major challenges to our security, but provide enormous opportunities to create new alliances and forge new paths to peace and prosperity in many troubled areas of the world.”²

KEY POINTS

- ISIS’ genocide of religious minorities demonstrates the ongoing salience of religious beliefs and motives—and the need for American statecraft to solidly grasp political theology.
- The United States should further develop its “religious intelligence” capabilities, integrate this knowledge into broader decision making, and avoid secularizing political and military conflicts with religious actors.
- Religious freedom should be more integrated into the United States’ approach to peace building.
- Both U.S. diplomats and military leaders should be trained to engage their foreign counterparts and civil society leaders in religious-freedom promotion.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/bg3362>

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The swift rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq presented the United States with still another threat from a religiously motivated actor—yet American leaders struggled to “know the enemy.” Religious actors may be so deeply influenced by their beliefs about moral and spiritual truth that they take actions that seem irrational to secular actors—actions such as suicide bombing. At a minimum, U.S. attempts to understand religious actors should treat the sincerity of their religious commitments with due gravity. Failure to do so can limit our ability to predict hostile actions or to recognize opportunities for cooperation. As we examine ISIS’ recent genocide of religious minorities in Syria and Iraq, there are many signs that the U.S. failed to correctly apprehend this group’s commitments to its *stated* religious goals.

In the summer of 2014, ISIS seemed to catch the world by surprise when it overcame the Iraqi military to conquer the key city of Mosul and then swiftly announced the establishment of a global Islamic caliphate. ISIS then proceeded to overcome both the Syrian military and Syrian rebel forces to establish strongholds, including a capital in Raqqa. Over a three-year period, ISIS’ genocidal acts displaced more than 400,000 Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities from the country.³

Today, it is estimated that only 200,000 Christians remain in Iraq—down from 1.5 million before the 2003 fall of Saddam Hussein.⁴ Prior to the beginning of the civil war in Syria in 2011, there were an estimated 2.1 million Christians in the country, approximately 10 percent of the total population.⁵ As early as February 2014, an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 Christians had already fled as refugees.⁶ The large-scale disappearance of these ancient communities from the “cradle of Christianity” in just a few years is remarkable.

Despite the instantaneous global media coverage of ISIS’ atrocities and the terror group’s boasting of their gruesome acts on social media, the U.S. waited *two years* before Secretary of State John Kerry declared—on March 7, 2016—that ISIS had committed genocide against Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims.⁷ He did so under the looming threat of a congressional deadline for such a determination set one year earlier.⁸ Two days before the deadline, the U.S. House of Representatives increased the pressure by passing a resolution determining that the atrocities perpetrated by ISIS against religious minorities did indeed constitute “war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.”

Today, the genocide is still largely viewed through a human rights lens—and appears to receive only

1. David Waters, “‘God Gap’ Impedes U.S. Foreign Policy, Task Force Says,” *The Washington Post*, February 24, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/23/AR2010022305103.html> (accessed October 4, 2018).
2. R. Scott Appleby and Richard Cizik, “Engaging Religious Communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy,” Report of the Task Force on Religion and the Making of U.S. Foreign Policy, The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2010, http://keough.nd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/engaging_religious_communities_abroad.pdf (accessed October 4, 2018).
3. “Christians in Iraq: Peace or a Sword?” *The Economist*, February 10, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/erasmus/2015/02/christians-iraq> (accessed January 15, 2018) (citing displacement of 400,000 Christians), and “Thousands of Iraqi Refugees ‘Still at Risk’ Despite Ending of Mount Sinjar Siege,” *The Guardian*, August 14, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/14/thousands-iraqi-refugees-still-risk-siege-mount-sinjar> (accessed January 15, 2018).
4. “A Rock and a Hard Place,” *The Economist*, July 14, 2014, <https://www.economist.com/blogs/erasmus/2014/07/iraqi-christians-and-west> (accessed January 15, 2018).
5. U.S. Department of State, *July–December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report*, September 13, 2011, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010_5/168276.htm (accessed January 15, 2018).
6. “‘The sectarian strife that has rent apart Syria’s delicate multi-ethnic fabric has spawned a severe humanitarian crisis and driven 2.5 million refugees into neighboring countries.... The United Nations does not register Syrian refugees by religion[,] so cannot give an exact figure for Christians who have left, but estimates vary between 300,000 and 500,000,’ says Mark Ohanian, director of programs of the International Orthodox Christian Charities, which works inside Syria.” Ayla Jean Yackley, “Generations On, Christians Fleeing Syria Return to Turkish Homeland,” *Reuters*, February 28, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/28/us-syria-crisis-christians-turkey-idUSBREA1R09J20140228> (accessed January 15, 2018). See also Anne Barnard, “Assault on Christian Town Complicates Crisis in Syria,” *The New York Times*, September 10, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/11/world/middleeast/assault-on-christian-town-complicates-crisis-in-syria.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed January 15, 2018). More than 450,000 Christians had fled their homes by 2013.
7. Tom Gjelten, “State Department Declares ISIS Attacks On Christians Constitute Genocide,” *National Public Radio*, March 7, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/2016/03/17/470861310/state-department-declares-isis-attacks-on-christians-constitute-genocide> (accessed January 20, 2018).
8. Olivia Enos, “One Year Out, U.S. Has Little to Show In Preventing ISIS Genocide,” *Heritage Foundation Commentary*, March 17, 2017, <https://www.heritage.org/middle-east/commentary/one-year-out-us-has-little-show-preventing-isis-genocide>.

minimal examination from a national security perspective. This paper proposes lessons from ISIS' genocide of religious minorities for the broader foreign policy establishment.

- First, ISIS' genocide of religious minorities affirms the power of religious motives and the importance of understanding political theology⁹ to American statecraft.
- Second, the United States should further develop "religious intelligence" and integrate it into broader decision making in political and military conflicts with religious actors—rather than myopically secularizing these conflicts.
- Third, religious freedom should be more integrated into the United States' approach to peace building.

Both U.S. diplomats and military leaders should be trained to explain the pacifying effects of religious freedom to foreign governments and civil society leaders, warning them that extreme religious favoritism fosters sectarianism and violence. Where possible, the U.S. should engage religious actors in the promotion of religious freedom and pluralism.

American Statecraft Must Solidly Grasp Political Theology

It may seem blindingly obvious to describe ISIS as a religiously motivated actor. Yet multiple world leaders and academics offered—and continue to offer—secular descriptions of the group and secular explanations of its actions.

In September 2014, President Barack Obama stated, "ISIL is not 'Islamic.' No religion condones the killing of innocents, and the vast majority of ISIL's victims have been Muslim."¹⁰ While ISIS *did* kill more Muslims than religious minorities, the comparison is misleading because minorities were inherently a proportionally smaller percentage of the population to begin with—and thus more vulnerable to being eliminated. Furthermore, the statement dismissed out of hand ISIS' *stated intent* to eliminate Christianity. ISIS made no such claims about eliminating Sunni Muslims; rather, it sought to bring them into conformity with its more "pure" views and practices of Islam. Similarly, when ISIS broadcast its infamous video celebrating the beheading of 21 Coptic Christians, President Obama secularized the victims, ignoring ISIS' own description of them as the "People of the Cross," and instead referring to them as "Egyptian citizens."¹¹

Both President Obama and former President George W. Bush made it clear that they wanted to avoid characterizing incidents of terrorism as part of a "war with Islam." But there is a war *within* Islam: between the radical exclusion that Salafi-Jihadist groups (like ISIS) teach and other Muslim theologians who refute these groups' interpretation of the Quran. In September 2014, 122 Muslim leaders, including prominent theologians, published an open letter to the self-declared caliph of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, refuting ISIS' interpretation of Islam, including its enslavement of women and killing of Christians and Yazidis.¹²

At the same time, it is also true that ISIS' warfare is the direct result of their political theology.¹³ Rather

9. Throughout this paper, we use the term "political theology" (rather than "religious ideology") because it acknowledges that all religions have beliefs about politics—whether they range from withdrawal to engagement to dominance. The term was originally used to describe Christian thought, however, it can be describe the beliefs of *any* religious group, including Muslim groups like ISIS. Political theology does not differ in substance from the term religious ideology, but it acknowledges that a group's views of temporal matters (such as politics, governance, and economics) emerge from an overall system of religious belief that encompasses both the temporal and eternal realms. See Ahmed Dallal, *The Political Theology of ISIS* (Beirut: Tadween Publishing, 2018), <https://tadweenpublishing.com/blogs/news/the-political-theology-of-isis-by-ahmad-dallal-now-available-for-pre-order> (accessed October 4, 2018).

10. Ashley Killough, "Strong Reaction to Obama Statement: 'ISIL Is Not Islamic,'" CNN, September 10, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/10/politics/obama-isil-not-islamic/> (accessed January 15, 2018).

11. The White House, "Statement by the Press Secretary on the Murder of Egyptian Citizens," February 15, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/15/statement-press-secretary-murder-egyptian-citizens> (accessed January 15, 2018).

12. "Open Letter to Baghdadi," <http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com/> (accessed October 1, 2018).

13. For further reading on the differences between what "ordinary Muslims" believe and the beliefs of Jihadi-Salafist groups, see Mary Habeck, "The U.S. Must Identify Jihadi-Salafists Through Their Ideology, Practices, and Methodology—and Isolate Them," Heritage Foundation *Special Report* No. 200, July 9, 2018, https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/SR-200_web_0.pdf.

than downplaying the religious nature of groups like ISIS, Western leaders should acknowledge the religious roots of their beliefs, while also pointing out that their ideas are contested by their co-religionists.

As Graeme Wood wrote in *The Atlantic*, America's leaders can ill-afford to ignore religion—because understanding ISIS' political theology strengthens our capacity to both predict its actions and thwart its goals. Wood concluded that President Obama's statements reflected confusion that “may have contributed to significant strategic errors.”¹⁴

Princeton Professor Bernard Haykel described the Obama Administration's denials of ISIS' religious nature as “embarrassed and politically correct” explanations that neglect “what their religion has historically and legally required.”¹⁵ Haykel saw a Western bias that assumes if religious ideology “doesn't matter much in Washington or Berlin, surely it must be equally irrelevant in Raqqa or Mosul.”¹⁶

If the United States can learn from these mistakes by increasing our ability to understand the political theology of ISIS and other religiously motivated enemies, we may be better equipped to defeat them ideologically as well as militarily.

ISIS' Basic Theology. Political theology can be broadly understood as the manner in which a religious group's beliefs shape its views on politics, economics, governance, and society. These views may be informed by revelation, doctrine, texts, and/or leaders' interpretations. While all religious groups have theological beliefs, some interpretations of Islam (for example, Sufism) are more focused on the eternal and spiritual realm, with less empha-

sis on shaping the temporal world through political or military means. However, ISIS, which evolved from Al-Qaeda in Iraq, subscribes to Salafi-Jihadist Islam, which focuses on aggressively shaping the temporal world to Allah's will through political and military means.

ISIS' foundational theological belief is that true Islam consists of practicing the faith in the manner it perceives Mohamed and his immediate companions did. The Quran and the hadith (collections of sayings and stories from or concerning Mohamed, as narrated by his immediate companions), in this view, are the only reliable, Allah-provided guides for how to live in this way. Practicing Islam in any other way is a rejection of the *tawhīd* of Allah,¹⁷ meaning his uniqueness and oneness.¹⁸ Allah alone, the reasoning goes, is the source of truth, as revealed in the authentic Islamic holy texts. Any practice or interpretation of Islam that deviates from that standard is *bida* (innovation), and constitutes *shirk* (polytheism) or *riddah* (apostasy).

The fundamentalist practice of Islam is, in ISIS' eyes, the only way to receive Allah's blessing¹⁹ and achieve the global preeminence of Islam that ISIS believes Islamic holy texts prophesy. The true practice of Islam, starting in Mohamed's time, elevated the Arab tribes from humiliation and poverty and empowered them to conquer much of the known world.²⁰ The Muslim world's subsequent decline—and its supposed current humiliation and victimization by the non-Muslim world²¹—are the result of Allah withdrawing his favor because of impure Islamic practice.

14. Graeme Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants,” *The Atlantic*, March 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/> (accessed January 15, 2018).

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. A reader with even a passing familiarity with ISIS will recall the pose its fighters frequently strike with an index finger lifted skyward. The single lifted finger represents *tawhīd*. Nathaniel Zelinsky, “ISIS Sends a Message: What Gestures Say About Today's Middle East,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 3, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-09-03/isis-sends-message> (accessed October 4, 2018).

18. This is based on the group's reading of Quran Surah An-Nur 55: “They worship me [Allah] and do not associate anything with me.” ISIS will frequently refer to its practice of Islam as “pure monotheism.” For the quote, see Kyle Orton, “ISIS Announces the Restoration of the Caliphate,” June 29, 2014, <https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2014/06/29/isis-announces-the-restoration-of-the-caliphate/> (accessed October 4, 2018).

19. “[T]rue power relies in the creed of *tawhīd*, which liberates one from any fear save the fear of his Lord and grants him the support of his Lord.” “Reflections on the Final Crusade,” *Dabiq*, Vol. 4, <https://clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf> (accessed October 4, 2018), p. 39.

20. In its declaration of the caliphate, ISIS said, “So Allah raised them through this religion and honoured them by having them carry its message. He bestowed His grace on them, and made them the kings and masters of the world.” See Orton, “ISIS Announces the Restoration of the Caliphate.”

For that reason, ISIS rejects the Islamic scholarship that interprets some of the violent passages in Islamic holy texts as time- and place-specific—and therefore no longer applicable.²² ISIS insists that “Islam is the religion of war,” and that violent jihad against non-Muslims pleases Allah and will result in ISIS’ version of Islam defeating all other faiths.²³

ISIS broadly defines those who are legitimate targets of its jihad. For example:

- The group considers Muslims who do not practice Islam *as ISIS does* to be apostates or polytheists whom authentic Muslims must kill, in accordance with its interpretation of Quranic verses and various hadith.²⁴
- ISIS frequently mentions Shi’a²⁵ and Sufi²⁶ Muslims as examples of those who have deviated from true Islam, as well as Muslims—particular-

ly Muslim rulers—who support the rule of secular law—democracy in particular.²⁷ Democracy is anathema to ISIS, as it believes Islamic law alone should rule people. The group uses part of a Quranic verse, Yusuf 40, among others, as justification: “Legislation is not but for Allah. He has commanded that you worship not except Him. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know.”²⁸

- ISIS also tried to wipe out the Yazidi people in Iraq because they venerate a fallen angel, making them polytheists in ISIS’s eyes.²⁹

ISIS’ Caliphate. ISIS’ declaration of its so-called caliphate in June 2014 is in keeping with its theology. The group believes that the faithful practice of Islam requires reviving the Islamic state³⁰ (also known as a caliphate or khilafah) prophesied by Mohamed, as

21. Michael S. Smith II, “Transcript: Al-Baghdadi’s Latest Message,” Downrange, May 14, 2015, <https://insidethejihad.com/2015/05/transcript-al-baghdadis-latest-message/> (accessed October 4, 2018).

Where are the jets of the Arabian Peninsula’s rulers towards the Jews who desecrate the destination of our Messenger’s Isrā’ (al-Quds), peace be upon him, and who afflict the people of Palestine from amongst the Muslims with the worst of torment? Where is the support of ĀlSalūl and their allies for a million of the weak Muslims who are all without exception being exterminated in Burma? Where is their chivalry towards the barrel bombs of the Nusayriyyah and their cannons, which demolish the Muslims’ homes upon the heads of their dwellers from amongst the women, the children, and the weak in Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Homs, Damascus, and elsewhere. Where is the jealousy of the Arabian Peninsula’s rulers towards the noble women who are raped daily in Shām, Iraq, and the various lands of the Muslims? Where is the relief of the rulers of Mecca and Medina for the Muslims in China and the Muslims in India against whom the Hindus commit the worst of crimes daily, including murder, burning, rape, severing of joints, looting, plundering, and imprisonment? Where is their relief for them in Indonesia, the Caucasus, Africa, Khorasan, and everywhere else?

22. For a good articulation of this sort of scholarship, see “Open Letter to Baghdadi.”

23. Smith, “Transcript: Al-Baghdadi’s Latest Message.” To wit:

O Muslims, Islam was never for a day the religion of peace. Islam is the religion of war. Your Prophet (peace be upon him) was dispatched with the sword as a mercy to the creation. He was ordered [sic] with war until Allah is worshipped alone. He (peace be upon him) said to the polytheists of his people, “I came to you with slaughter.” He fought both the Arabs and non-Arabs in all their various colors. He himself left to fight and took part in dozens of battles. He never for a day grew tired of war. He (peace be upon him) passed away during the period he was preparing the expedition of Usāmah (may Allah be pleased with him). And from his last instructions—peace be upon him—was [sic], “Dispatch the expedition of Usāmah.”

24. “Kill the Imāms of Kufr in the West,” *Dabiq*, Vol. 14 (April 2016), <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/the-islamic-state-22dacc84biq-magazine-1422.pdf> (accessed October 10, 2018), pp. 8–17.

25. “From the Battle of Al-Ahzāb to the War of Coalitions,” *Dabiq*, Vol. 11, <https://clarionproject.org/docs/Issue%2011%20-%20From%20the%20battle%20of%20Al-Ahzab%20to%20the%20war%20of%20coalitions.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018), p. 53.

26. Rukmini Callimachi, “To the World, They Are Muslims. To ISIS, Sufis Are Heretics,” *The New York Times*, November 25, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/25/world/middleeast/sufi-muslims-isis-sinai.html> (accessed October 4, 2018).

27. “Imamah Is From the Millah of Ibrahim,” *Dabiq*, Vol. 1, <https://clarionproject.org/docs/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018), p. 25.

28. “Foreword,” *Dabiq*, Vol. 15, <https://clarionproject.org/factsheets-files/islamic-state-magazine-dabiq-fifteen-breaking-the-cross.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018), p. 6.

29. “Indeed Your Lord Is Ever Watchful,” *Dabiq*, Vol. 4, p. 3, <https://clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018).

30. Orton, “ISIS Announces the Restoration of the Caliphate.”

recorded in a hadith.³¹ The prophesied caliphate is a revival of a previous caliphate that vanished and was followed by a period of untrue Islamic practice.³² The revival of the caliphate is supposedly part of a series of events leading to an Armageddon-type battle ushering in the final, global rule of Muslims.

As part of its caliphate declaration, ISIS announced its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, as caliph, and emphasized all Muslims' supposed obligation to migrate to the caliphate to support it, or—if a Muslim was unable to emigrate—to fight jihad wherever he was.³³ ISIS further claims that Baghdadi's position as caliph grants him the authority to command Muslims around the world.³⁴

Many Muslims disagree that ISIS' "caliphate" is legitimate. Since the true caliphate is necessarily a place where Muslims would practice Islam in its purest form, ISIS fastidiously implements its own, "true" form of Islam to prove the caliphate's legitimacy and win Allah's favor. For example, ISIS, invoking the example of Mohamed's successor, Abu Bakr,³⁵ hurls suspected homosexuals from rooftops and stones their bodies, and stones adulterers to death as well.³⁶

ISIS' practice of slavery is also a result of its archaic and literalist interpretation of certain Islamic texts. The fourth issue of *Dabiq* explains ISIS's Islamic jus-

tification for reviving slavery,³⁷ while issue nine also has a lengthy rationalization—including of sexual enslavement.³⁸ In a video of ISIS terrorists discussing selling Yazidi sex slaves, one quotes a section of one of the same Quranic verses used in *Dabiq* to justify slavery.³⁹ Former slaves tell of ISIS fighters echoing the same logic found in *Dabiq* to defend their treatment of the slaves.⁴⁰ *Dabiq* also points out that the revival of slavery is one of the signs of the coming apocalypse, and therefore more evidence that ISIS has revived the true caliphate.⁴¹

ISIS' Theology of Christians. ISIS roots its genocidal treatment of Christians in its theology, as explained in a long piece entitled "Break the Cross" in *Dabiq* issue 15. ISIS believes that the pre-Christ heroes of the Bible, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses, were true servants of Allah, as they worshiped him alone. They believe that Allah sent Jesus Christ to earth as a prophet to warn the Jews of their corruption and foretell his own coming again as the Messiah, the one who will defeat the anti-Christ in the end times.⁴²

It is the Christian concept of the Trinity that inspires much of ISIS' hatred. Christians believe that God is three-in-one: the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. To ISIS, this is polytheism, a heretical departure from *tawhid*.⁴³ ISIS literature

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31. "Introduction," *Dabiq*, Vol. 1, <https://clarionproject.org/docs/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018), pp. 4-5.
 32. "Feature: From Hijrah to Khilafah," *Dabiq*, Vol. 1, <https://clarionproject.org/docs/isis-isil-islamic-state-magazine-Issue-1-the-return-of-khilafah.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018), pp. 34-35.
 33. "Reflections on the Final Crusade," p. 44.
 34. "Words of Sincere Advice," p. 27, and Orton, "ISIS Announces the Restoration of the Caliphate."
 35. "Islamic State Reports," *Dabiq*, Vol. 7, <https://clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-dabiq-magazine-issue-7-from-hypocrisy-to-apostasy.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018), p. 43.
 36. "ISIS Thugs Stone Accused Adulterers to Death," *New York Post*, June 17, 2016, <https://nypost.com/2016/06/17/isis-thugs-stone-accused-adulterers-to-death/> (accessed October 22, 2018).
 37. "The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour," *Dabiq*, Vol. 4, <https://clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018), p. 15.
 38. "By the Sword," *Dabiq*, Vol. 15, <https://clarionproject.org/factsheets-files/islamic-state-magazine-dabiq-fifteen-breaking-the-cross.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018), p. 80.
 39. "The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour," and "ISIS Slave Market Day," *The New York Times*, November 15, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/middleeast/100000003226608/isis-slave-market-day.html> (accessed October 11, 2018).
 40. Rukmini Callimachi, "ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape," *The New York Times*, August 13, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/14/world/middleeast/isis-enshrines-a-theology-of-rape.html> (accessed October 11, 2018).
 41. "The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour."
 42. "Break the Cross," *Dabiq*, Vol. 15, <https://clarionproject.org/factsheets-files/islamic-state-magazine-dabiq-fifteen-breaking-the-cross.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018), pp. 46-47.
 43. "Why We Hate You and Why We Fight You," *Dabiq*, Vol. 15, <http://clarionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/islamic-state-magazine-dabiq-fifteen-breaking-the-cross.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018), p. 31.

frequently refers to Christians as “cross-worshippers,” *taghut* (defined as “an Arabic term that is specifically used to denounce everything that is worshipped instead or besides Allah”⁴⁴), and *mushrikīn* (polytheists). The transgression is all the more grievous because Christians had access to “pure monotheism” but corrupted it with the doctrine of the trinity.

Christians also figure prominently in ISIS beliefs about the end times. European and Middle Eastern Christians will comprise the army of Rome that will fight the Muslim army in the final battle.⁴⁵ Christians are the final enemy Muslims will have to defeat, so it is rational for ISIS to hate and persecute them now. ISIS can also point to its current persecution of Christians as proof that it has established the true caliphate, since Muslim-Christian war is a feature of the end times involving the caliphate.

ISIS also believes the mere existence of Christianity (and other religions) is a threat to the true practice of Islam, of which it is the defender and promoter, as Christianity is simultaneously antagonistic to Islam and a threat to cause Muslims to apostasize. To justify its beliefs in this regard, the group invokes a number of Quranic verses, such as Al-Ma’idah 51 (“O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you—then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing People.”) and Al-Baqarah 120 (“And never will the Jews or the Christians approve of you until you follow their religion. Say, ‘Indeed, the guidance of Allah is the [only] guidance.’ If you were to fol-

low their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, you would have against Allah no protector or helper.”)⁴⁶ In one of his most prominent speeches, al-Baghdadi warned against the same.⁴⁷

ISIS also associates Christians with its great enemy, the West. ISIS hates the West for, among other reasons, its rule of secular law and what ISIS believes is the West’s moral degradation because of its permissive views on sexuality, the toleration of atheism and other non-Islamic belief systems, and the protection of women’s rights.⁴⁸ Finally, ISIS accuses Christians of supporting the regimes ISIS hates, such as President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi’s government in Egypt⁴⁹ or President Bashar al-Assad’s in Syria.

ISIS literature claims that Christians can convert, be killed, or, as a gesture of humiliation, pay *jizya*, a tax, the payment of which supposedly grants them safety as long as they continue paying and abiding by the terms of the contract (in accordance with ISIS’ interpretation of Quranic verse At-Tawbah 29).⁵⁰ However, ISIS literature is inconsistent on the *jizya* issue. It makes clear that paying *jizya* is an “exceptional” circumstance—and that the default treatment of Christians should be to kill them.⁵¹ ISIS also believes that Allah has promised the group that it will “conquer [Christians] Rome, break [Christians] crosses, and enslave [Christians] women.”⁵² ISIS literature furthermore assures readers that the group will continue fighting—the most it will accept is a temporary truce—until “paganism,” under which banner it includes Christianity, is eliminated and only “true” Muslims remain.⁵³

44. Gerald Drissner, “What Is a Tāghūt?” Arabic For Nerds, January 21, 2017, <http://www.arabic-for-nerds.com/2017/01/21/what-is-a-taghut/> (accessed October 11, 2018).

45. “Reflections on the Final Crusade,” p. 34.

46. Quoted in “Reflections on the Final Crusade,” pp. 43–44.

47. “O Muslims, the Jews, the Christians, and the rest of the disbelievers will not approve of you nor abandon waging war against you until you follow their religion and apostatize from yours. This is the word of your Lord (the Mighty and Majestic) and the tidings of your Prophet, the truthful and trustworthy, peace be upon him.” See Mutiara Hitam, “March Forth Whether Light of Heavy,” Lan’s Notes, May 15, 2015, <https://yolandaelvira.wordpress.com/2015/05/15/march-forth-whether-light-or-heavy/> (accessed October 4, 2018).

48. “The Fitrah of Mankind and the Near Extinction of the Western Woman,” *Dabiq*, Vol. 15, <http://clarionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/islamic-state-magazine-dabiq-fifteen-breaking-the-cross.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018), p. 20.

49. “The Ruling on the Belligerent Christians,” *Rumiyah*, Vol. 9 (May 2017), <https://qb5cc3pam3y2ad0tm1zxuho-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Rumiyah-9.pdf> (October 11, 2018), p. 7.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

51. *Ibid.*

52. “Foreword,” *Dabiq*, Vol. 4, <https://clarionproject.org/docs/islamic-state-isis-magazine-Issue-4-the-failed-crusade.pdf> (accessed October 11, 2018), p. 5.

53. “Why We Hate You and Why We Fight You,” p. 31.

ISIS' political theology is explicitly anti-Western, anti-Christian, and apocalyptic. Its call for jihad is not merely an internal struggle to overcome the temptation to do evil that many Muslims consider to be their duty through the five pillars of Islam (declaration of the faith, fasting, daily prayer, charity, and pilgrimage to Mecca); it is a call to external physical action against unbelievers, particularly Islam's arch-enemy, Christianity. In ISIS' twist on Islam, jihad against the infidels is not simply a collective duty (*fard kifaya*) but the spiritual duty of each individual (*fard ayn*).

There has been little reporting on the extent to which the U.S. intelligence and diplomatic communities recognized ISIS' genocidal intent and predicted the targeting of Christians, Yazidis, and other religious minorities. But based on the comments of President Obama, it is clear that there was no desire to publicly acknowledge ISIS' determination to exterminate Christians. In the event that there is a review of the diplomatic and intelligence communities' assessments, there should be an examination into whether the overall strategy to defeat ISIS took into account the group's political theology and genocidal intent.

The U.S. Should Further Develop Its “Religious Intelligence” Capabilities

In 2006, Madeleine K. Albright, former Secretary of State in the Administration of President Bill Clinton, published a book entitled *The Mighty and the Almighty*. In it she described a “God gap” in the way that she and other diplomats of her generation viewed religion:

Religion was not a respecter of national borders; it was above and beyond reason; it evoked the deepest passions; and historically, it was the cause of much bloodshed. Diplomats in my era were taught not to invite trouble, and no subject seemed more inherently treacherous than religion.⁵⁴

Tom Farr, the President of the Religious Freedom Institute, recounts that when the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research once prepared a memorandum on Catholic religious views for the Secretary of State, it was rejected as inappropriate material.⁵⁵

Today Albright's approach to religion is much different. She tells students of foreign policy that in order to persuade other countries to act in alignment with America's strategic goals, they must clearly grasp what matters most to them: In other words, “know your customer.” She writes, “In world affairs, it means learning about foreign countries and cultures; at a time when religious passions are embroiling the globe, that cannot be done without taking religious tenets and motivations fully into account.”⁵⁶

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs Task Force also recommended that the United States government develop a deeper understanding of religion's role in politics and society around the globe. The State Department, Defense Department, and Central Intelligence Agency reportedly all provide some training in religion to some officers.⁵⁷ Training for U.S. diplomats and military personnel to “know their customers” has always included foreign languages and training in “cultural intelligence.” Their preparation should also include engaging with devout religious actors whose religious commitments may have the most profound influence on their actions. Training in “religious intelligence” should not only include political theology but also education in the lived experiences of religious individuals in their communities and with their leaders—with awareness of evolving trends.

The world is likely to become more religious in the future. Two leading demographers of religion, Todd Johnson and David Barrett, have concluded, “Demographic trends coupled with conservative estimates of conversions and defections envision over 80 percent of the world's population will continue to be affiliated to religions 200 years into the future.”⁵⁸

54. “Book Excerpt: Madeleine Albright's ‘The Mighty and the Almighty,’” ABC News, May 2, 2006, https://archive.org/stream/mightyalmie00albr/mightyalmie00albr_djvu.txt (accessed October 15, 2018), p. 6.

55. “Religious Freedom: The Unused Tool in a Diplomat's Toolkit,” Religious Freedom Institute, August 25, 2018, <https://www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/blog/religious-freedom-the-unused-tool-in-a-diplomats-toolkit> (accessed October 15, 2018).

56. Ibid., and Madeleine Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on God, America, and World Affairs*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), p. 11.

57. Kara Tippet and Douglas Johnston, “Diplomacy and Religion in the 21st Century,” *On Being*, January 3, 2008, <https://onbeing.org/programs/douglas-johnston-diplomacy-and-religion-in-the-21st-century/> (accessed October 4, 2018).

58. Thomas F. Farr, “Diplomacy in An Age of Faith,” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2008), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2008-03-02/diplomacy-age-faith> (accessed October 16, 2018).

But Americans are becoming increasingly secular.⁵⁹ A study by the Pew Research Center showed that secularism has steadily increased with every generation of Americans and that 23 percent of millennial Americans consider themselves “nones” (religiously unaffiliated, agnostic, or atheist).⁶⁰ If these trends continue, our “God gap” is likely to grow.

While a person can develop religious intelligence without having personal religious belief, the popularity of religious studies is likely to decline along with religiosity. Americans’ knowledge of the historical influence of Judaism and Christianity on the political and legal foundations of their own country is diminishing. This suggests that we may need concerted efforts to build “religious intelligence” in future generations of diplomats and military officers.⁶¹

It will be necessary to combat intellectual and institutional resistance to incorporating more training in “religious intelligence.” This is not only because many foreign policy experts dismiss religion as irrelevant, as in Albright’s formative years, but somewhat ironically because of fear of exacerbating conflict with radical Muslims.

Both Republican and Democrat administrations have sought to downplay the specter of civilizational conflict between Islam and Christianity. Although the United States has a secular government and no official religion, it is still often viewed by many in the world as a nation with a Christian heritage and identity. As a result, Muslims have sometimes blamed local Christian communities for the words and deeds of the U.S. government and incendiary actions by American Christians. For instance, when American pastors threatened to burn the Quran, this incensed Muslims who took out their anger by attacking both

foreign and local Christian targets overseas.⁶² Incidents like these may make federal employees exceptionally cautious about speaking on religious matters or engaging with religious actors.

In addition, many government officials misunderstand the U.S. Constitution’s Establishment Clause as a prohibition on speaking about religious matters generally. While it does prohibit the federal government from establishing an official state religion, it does not prohibit government officials from engaging in dialogue with or interacting with religious actors. The government should equip and encourage diplomats and military officials to interact with religious actors to increase our understanding of potential foes and to recognize prospects for cooperation with potential friends.

Some of the concern about a conflict between Islam and the West can be traced back to Professor Samuel Huntington’s 1996 book, *Clash of Civilizations*, which warned that after the Cold War, the next great international conflicts would be along civilizational lines. He recognized that religion would be a central defining characteristic of civilizations and predicted massive conflicts between Islam (Muslim-majority countries) and the West (countries with Judeo-Christian roots).⁶³

At approximately the same time, the former Executive Vice-President of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Douglas Johnston, also perceived that world affairs and the work of diplomacy were about to be radically changed by religious dynamics. His book, entitled *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, compiled case studies from Africa, Latin America, and Europe and became popular reading for new U.S. diplomats.⁶⁴ Johnston did

59. Pew Research Center, *The Changing Global Religious Landscape*, April 5, 2017, <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2017/04/07092755/FULL-REPORT-WITH-APPENDIXES-A-AND-B-APRIL-3.pdf> (accessed October 4, 2018), and Michael Lipka and David McLendon, “Why People With No Religion Are Projected to Decline as a Share of the World’s Population,” Pew Research Center, April 7, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/07/why-people-with-no-religion-are-projected-to-decline-as-a-share-of-the-worlds-population/> (accessed October 5, 2018).

60. Gregory A. Smith and Alan Cooperman, “The Factors Driving the Growth of Religious ‘Nones’ in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, September 4, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/14/the-factors-driving-the-growth-of-religious-nones-in-the-u-s/> (accessed October 5, 2018).

61. Daniel Dreisbach, “The Book That Made America,” *The Catholic World Report*, April 28, 2017 <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2017/04/28/the-book-that-made-america/> (accessed October 5, 2018).

62. Kevin Sieff, “Florida Pastor Terry Jones’s Koran Burning Has Far-Reaching Effect,” *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/florida-pastor-terry-jones-koran-burning-has-far-reachingeffect/2011/04/02/AFpiFoQC_story.html?utm_term=.442cb982e2b0 (accessed October 5, 2018).

63. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Simon & Schuster, 1996).

64. Douglas Johnston, *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

not envision the disconnect between the West and Islam as inevitably leading to an intractable “conflict of civilizations.”

Instead, he described it as a matter of speaking different languages. The West, according to Johnston, speaks the language of separation between religion and politics, while Islam speaks the language of integration. Johnston believed that American diplomats’ own secular bias is why they were caught unaware by the Iranian revolution of 1979, and he warned, in 2008, that our understanding of Iraq was similarly crippled.

And, you know, if you just look at Iraq today, you quickly conclude that we as a nation-state have virtually no ability to deal with religious differences in a hostile setting, nor any ability to counter demigods, like Bin Laden or Milosevic, who manipulate religion for their own purposes. And, you know, we’re one of the most religious nations in the world today...and yet we so compartmentalize it that unfortunately, we’ve let our separation of church and state—which I would not suggest that we change at all, but we’ve let that become a crutch for not doing our homework on how religion informs the worldviews and political aspirations of others. By having this so compartmentalized, we’ve had it off the table.⁶⁵

From a genocide-prevention perspective, understanding how a group like ISIS thinks, who its enemies are, and what its symbolic targets will be can help us anticipate who, where, and how to direct our efforts. A deeper understanding of ISIS’ political theology might have helped the U.S. anticipate that ISIS would attack significant symbols of minority religions (churches, shrines, and monasteries) and kidnap their leaders (bishops). If we ourselves are unable to act in a direct manner to prevent an attack, this intelligence can be shared with our allies. When a group like ISIS declares that it will carry out “jihad” against a particular religious group, we should expect it to follow through with action.

Dismissing religious statements constrains our ability to know our enemies. In the future, as the United Nations assists the government of Iraq in

its efforts to criminally prosecute members of ISIS for genocide, it should take into account their statements of grave hostility toward religious minorities, including Christians. Any discounting of ISIS’ statements because they are religious in nature would essentially raise the burden of proof of the intent to commit genocide—and compound the wrongs that ISIS’ victims have already suffered.

A deeper understanding of how religion motivates radicalization can also help us counteract it. As Turkish scholar Ziya Meral writes, ISIS addresses the greatest philosophical question of all: “Why live?” During the Obama Administration, a strong focus of its countering violent extremism efforts was on improving economic opportunities and creating jobs for potential ISIS recruits. But many ISIS fighters *left* jobs in Western nations for the spiritual fulfillment of realizing the caliphate.

If groups like ISIS appeal to recruits with promises of metaphysical fulfillment, it will be difficult for the U.S. to counter ISIS’ ideology with economic alternatives alone. America should urge foreign governments to enlarge religious freedom and other human rights because a pluralistic society is more able to generate alternatives to violent jihad.

U.S. Approach to Peace Building Must Incorporate Religious Freedom

The research of social scientists Dr. Brian Grim and Dr. Roger Finke also offers an alternative to Professor Huntington’s clash-of-civilizations thesis. Grim and Finke’s empirical findings demonstrate that it is not a society’s degree of religiosity or the existence of theological differences between religions that is the primary driver of violent social conflict. Rather, religious freedom has “pacifying consequences.” When social and government restrictions on religion are reduced, violent religious persecution is reduced. The reverse is also true. Grim and Finke conclude there is a “close relationship between legal restrictions on religion and broader religion-related violence, including terrorism and war.”⁶⁶ The irony is that when governments attempt to reduce tensions by restricting religions, this often leads to more tension and potentially more conflict.

Grim and Finke’s research converted the infor-

65. Tippet and Johnston, “Diplomacy and Religion in the 21st Century.”

66. Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, *The Price of Freedom Denied* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 210–211.

mation found in the State Department's International Religious Freedom Reports into more than 100 different variables describing religious freedom. They developed three standardized indexes—Social Restriction on Religion, Government Restriction on Religion, and Violent Religious Persecution—to compare 195 countries.⁶⁷

Grim and Finke's cross-national comparisons revealed that the countries that scored highest on Social Restriction and Government Restriction indices were the most likely to experience Violent Religious Persecution. Their analysis yields important results both for governments dealing with radical religious groups in their own territory, like Iraq, and governments seeking to combat the influence and growth of these groups transnationally, like the U.S.⁶⁸ Their work points to twin errors by governments that try to reduce conflict by restricting religion—which have the unintended consequences of raising the probability of violent religious conflict and persecution.

Favoritism. The first error is extreme religious favoritism. Their in-depth analysis of several Muslim-majority societies showed that they have the highest levels of violent religious persecution—and that this is strongly correlated with their extremely high levels of favoritism toward one religious sect.

Governments like Iraq and Pakistan are in a perpetual tug of war with radical religious sects that seek higher levels of favoritism for their own groups at the cost of other religious groups. The implementation of Shari'a law is seen as extreme religious favoritism. Governments that give into these demands may believe it will lead to a reduction in conflict, but in the long term, higher government favoritism of religion is correlated with higher levels of violent religious persecution and conflict.

Regulation. The second error that governments make is extreme regulation of religion. They found that where governments attempted to suppress the social functions and influence of religion through strict secularism (e.g., Algeria, Egypt, Iran [under the Shah], and Syria), such suppression actually led

to the rise of militant Islamic fundamentalism.⁶⁹ These governments' attempts to secularize their societies ended up fomenting a backlash from violent sects that would not tolerate the suppression of their religious practices.

The lesson from Grim and Finke's work for the governments of Muslim-majority countries is to resist the appeal of both radical sectarians and secularists to limit religious competition. Instead, government should allow religious groups to compete freely against each other and against secular ideas. In addition, eliminating or lessening social restrictions on religion is critical to lowering levels of violent religious persecution and conflict. Governments may have less control of social restrictions than of their own behavior, but they can create and enforce policies to empower elements of society that favor freedom.

Governments may not value religious freedom for its intrinsic good nor for its ability to reduce violence. However, Grim and Finke's research also points to other positive externalities of religious freedom. A study of 101 countries by the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom found that religious freedom is strongly correlated with other freedoms, including civil and political liberty, press freedom, and economic freedom. Religious freedom is also associated with overall human development as measured by the United Nations Development Program's human development index.⁷⁰

As U.S. officials seek to promote fundamental human rights, they should emphasize both the inherent value of freedom to individuals of all faiths and its role in fostering freedom to build peace. Some religious actors will reject attempts to persuade, while others will view them with skepticism. But diplomats and military leaders should work to identify those religious actors who understand that religious freedom is essential to fostering peace in their societies. Partnering with them to this end can help stabilize internal social dynamics. And ultimately, domestic stability prevents cross-border spillover in the form of terrorist attacks and refugee

67. Brian J. Grim and Roger Finke, "International Religious Freedom Data Set (Grim and Finke Data Set)," Berkeley Center, July 1, 2006, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/publications/international-religious-freedom-data-grim-and-finke-data-set> (accessed January 15, 2018)

68. Grim and Finke, *The Price of Freedom*, p. 221.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

flows. Rather than secularizing religious conflicts so as to avoid falling into a “clash of civilizations” narrative, American diplomats and military leaders should encourage governments that face religious extremism to hold the line on freedom.

In 2005, the United States had an opportunity to encourage the Iraqi government to resist demands by the most influential Shi’a religious leader at the time, Ayatollah Ali Hussein Al-Sistani. However, there is little evidence that the United States tried to prevent Iraq from adopting a “supremacy clause” in its constitution that elevated Islam above all other religions and made it the foundational and supreme source of legislation.⁷¹ The Iraqi government also gave the Shi’a-dominated clergy the right to interpret the Constitution by allowing for the appointment of “experts in Islamic jurisprudence” to the Federal Supreme Court.⁷²

Hudson Institute experts John F. Cullinan and Nina Shea wrote at the time (nine years before the genocide began): “Religious minorities as well as women will suffer under Iraq’s proposed constitutional architecture. The provisions we’ve cited further reinforce the second-class status of Iraq’s already beleaguered Christian community, now roughly three [sic] percent of the overall population and rapidly shrinking. Iraq’s proposed constitution threatens to bring this ancient community one step closer to extinction.”⁷³ They warned: “[T]he ultimate logic of a regime of group rights inevitably fractures political communities into ever-smaller and ever-more antagonistic sub-units, as

individuals seek out the company and protection of their own kind. It leads, in other words, to situations like the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.”

The United States government could have explained to the government of Iraq that religious freedom has a pacifying effect on social conflict. Unfortunately, Cullinan’s and Shea’s warning went largely unheeded.

Iraq’s deeply flawed decision to subjugate all of its citizens to Islamic jurisprudence as interpreted by Shi’a clerics deepened sectarian divisions. The emphasis on group (rather than individual) rights is evident even in its attempt to protect the religious freedom of Yazidis and Christians—while placing them under the authority of Islamic law. The constitutional framework put Iraqi society into a constant state of disequilibrium and exacerbated conflict between religious groups. Sunni resentment of Shi’a power grabs are well-documented and provided some of the fuel for Al-Qaeda in Iraq to rise—and ultimately transform into ISIS.⁷⁴

Twenty years ago, in 1998, the U.S. Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act. Since then, America has launched efforts to promote religious freedom worldwide unparalleled by any other government. Through our embassies and extensive contacts with religious leaders, the United States has tremendous capacity to gather information on the status of religious freedom, to engage religious actors, and to understand their political theologies.

71. From the Iraqi Constitution, Article 2:

First: Islam is the official religion of the State and is a foundation source of legislation:

- A. No law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam
- B. No law may be enacted that contradicts the principles of democracy.
- C. No law may be enacted that contradicts the rights and basic freedoms stipulated in this Constitution.

Second: This Constitution guarantees the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people and guarantees the full religious rights to freedom of religious belief and practice of all individuals such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandeans Sabians.

See “Iraqi Constitution,” https://web.archive.org/web/20161128152712/http://www.iraqinationality.gov.iq/attach/iraqi_constitution.pdf (accessed January 15, 2018).

72. U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Iraq’s Permanent Constitution,” March 2006, <http://www.uscirf.gov/reports-briefs/special-reports/iraqs-permanent-constitution-march-2006> (accessed January 15, 2018). (“[C]onstitutional arrangement establishing a role for Islam as a source of legislation nevertheless ‘could be used by judges to abridge the internationally recognized human rights of political and social reformers, those voicing criticism of prevailing policies, religious minorities, women, or others.’ This concern is amplified by the fact that the new permanent constitution allows for the appointment of ‘experts in Islamic jurisprudence’ to the Federal Supreme Court.”)
73. John F. Cullinan and Nina Shea, “Constitutional Concerns: Religious Freedom Is at Risk in the New Iraq,” August 29, 2005, <https://www.hudson.org/research/4541-constitutional-concerns-religious-freedom-is-at-risk-in-the-new-iraq> (accessed January 15, 2018).
74. Zaid Al-Ali, “How Maliki Ruined Iraq,” *Foreign Policy*, June 19, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/06/19/how-maliki-ruined-iraq/> (accessed March 10, 2018).

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom (who now oversees the staff of the former Office of Religion and Global Affairs), and the Special Advisor on Near East and Central Asian Minorities each have in-depth understanding of the benefits of religious freedom and the threats to it. They should be at the hub of efforts to craft diplomatic and military strategies to engage religious actors who can be allies in promoting freedom.

Our own history as a nation founded by refugees from religious repression can richly inform our promotion of religious freedom abroad. *The Economist* noted the irony: “The strange thing is that when America has tried to tackle religious politics abroad—especially jihadist violence—it has drawn no lessons from its domestic success. Why has a country so rooted in pluralism made so little of religious freedom?”⁷⁵ We should integrate our own experience of religious freedom and existing institutional expertise into efforts to prevent atrocities and to win the battle against religious intolerance and violence.⁷⁶

Conclusion

For too long, America has ignored or minimized religion’s influence on global affairs. But this has not changed the influence that religion possesses as a primary, and sometimes most powerful, motivator of human action. The Trump Administration and future ones should formulate foreign policy strategies with a more realistic understanding of how both leaders and their followers are shaped by their theo-

logical understandings of the world. The rise of ISIS presented the United States with both a national security threat and an existential threat to the existence of religious minorities in the Middle East. We were not swift to grasp the strategic implications of ISIS’ religious declarations, either for ourselves or for their targets of harm.

In the future, we should build the capacity of our diplomats, military, and intelligence officials to understand and engage religiously motivated actors. We should also integrate our own understanding of the value of religious freedom into our foreign policy. The power of religion is as much an opportunity as it is a threat. As Tom Farr writes, “Rather than being inimical to the advance of freedom, as many secularists assume, religious ideas and actors can buttress and expand ordered liberty. For much of the world, the religious quest lies at the heart of human dignity.”

It is in America’s own long-term security interests to understand the political theology of religious actors. Doing so will help us better know our enemies and recognize potential allies in the work of countering threats, building freedom, and securing peace.

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75. Farr, “Diplomacy in an Age of Faith.”

76. Ibid.