

The Significance of the Religious Dimension in Understanding Contemporary International Interactions

أهمية البعد الديني في فهم التفاعلات الدولية المعاصرة

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Abstract:

The Cold War era was defined by the prevalence of several notions and variables for interpreting foreign politics, including power, balance of power, and national interest, often at the expense of moral considerations. The value issue, particularly in its religious dimension, diminished in the priorities of foreign policy among nations and thereafter became ignored for an extended period. Following the conclusion of the Cold War and the breakup of the socialist camp, certain widely held postulates were abandoned since they could no longer be used to interpret, comprehend, and analyze the world. Thus, a new understanding of the international relations network arose, in which the religious value factor competed with other factors. The purpose of this article is to explain how religious considerations may contribute to a better understanding of contemporary international relations. Nevertheless, the author came to the conclusion that, even while religion plays a significant role in international relations, it is still unable to fully explain all of the interactions that take place on a global level.

Keywords: Religion, Foreign Policy, International Interactions

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Introduction

The study and analysis of values was the starting point for the investigation of the religious dimension in international relations, but the concept of values in international relations has remained a source of controversy among diverse ideas in this field. Several idealistic intellectuals proposed theories regarding war and peace, as well as positions against racist governments and other aspects of international relations. However, the ideas of this perspective gave way to the supremacy of the realistic perspective's categories in the study of international relations after WWII.

The return of the religious and values dimension in an attempt to analyze the new variables and phenomena that appeared in international relations, however, was spurred by the post-Cold War international transformations that theorists of the field were unable to address with their traditional tools and theories. As a result, the cultural dimension became one of the most significant dimensions of the study of the international phenomenon.

In view of the recent changes the globe has seen, the majority of which have tended to consolidate religious, cultural, and civilizational aspects in diverse international contacts. At the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries, religion played a significant role in the majority of conflicts and wars. The modern world has also seen a religious resurgence that has transformed states and communities and altered many facets of daily life. One of the most significant effects of the international changes that the world witnessed at the end of the twentieth century was the disintegration of societies into new ramifications centered on various religious, national, linguistic, and ethnic identities, which led to religion's growing role in international relationships as a major component of many countries' foreign policy.

This article's goal is to make clear how the religious factor contributes to our understanding and analysis of the dynamics of modern international conflict as an important and helpful explanatory variable. This is achieved by relying on the descriptive approach, which was applied to clarify the role of religion in comprehending international relations. Additionally, the comparative approach was employed to illustrate the differences between different theories and claims about the importance of religion and value components in comprehending current events.

The article is organized into three sections. The first section presents a summary of different theories that examine the influence of religion in international relations. The second section offers a review of theoretical concepts in international relations that elucidate the role of religion. The final section serves as an applied section, discussing real-world examples and cases where religion significantly impacts international relations.

Firstly: Religion-Based Theories in International Relations

Various IR theories can explain the role of religion in international politics. Religion influences all three levels of Waltzian analysis of international relations: individual level, state level, and system level. It shapes the personality and preferences of policymakers; it influences the domestic regime and interests of states, and it is a major source of international norms.¹

It would be overstating the situation to claim that IR is primarily motivated by religion. We will go through a few theories below that contend religion plays a big part in IR.

1. The Constructivist Theory

Constructivism first surfaced as a novel approach or substitute paradigm in the field of international relations during the 1980s, thanks to the publications of "Nicolas Onuf" and "Alexander Wendt". Constructivist theories gained legitimacy with the conclusion of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's fall because both liberalism and realism were unable to forecast or adequately explain this occurrence. This is what led the scholar Abdenacer Jandli to assert that one of the factors that led to the formation of the formative (reflective) trend in international relationships—including constructivism, which many theorists see as the result of the development of the critical theory of the third dialogue in the 1980s—was the explanatory trend's inability to crystallize an integrated theoretical trend in international relationships. It attempted to familiarize itself with all the theory's components and variables in order to provide an integrated perspective that establishes the building of a general theory in international relations. Some even refer to it as the "Bridge Gap" that separates post-formative positivist ideas from interpretive positivist movements.²

Constructivism is an approach to international politics that emphasizes theories that show how the interplay of state interests and identities shapes the actions and attitudes of participants. International politics are shaped "by persuasive ideas, collective values, culture, and social ideas," according to Snyder.³ In the study of international politics, it has placed a high value on the ideal (non-material) institutions that regulate the interactions between the various players. In addition to examining the material elements that rationalists embrace, it also examined the significance of psychological factors and a shared understanding in influencing state interests and preferences, as well as the role that culture, values, and ideas play in international relations.

How various groups may realize their identities and interests is the central concern for constructivism in the post-Cold War era; however, the constructivist analysis does not rule out the variable of power and, consequently, how the actors may alter their behavior, which is all reflected in the discourse's capacity to influence.⁴ As is evident today, we find topics of extraordinary interest in the contemporary official discourse in the United States. This discourse has become accustomed to repeating biblical phrases and symbols, to the point where every president of the United States of America is required to discuss, in one or more paragraphs, his profound faith in God's mercy and maintenance of America. It is necessary to generalize this paradigm to other nations.⁵

We can concentrate on the religious factor and its role in the societal discourse in light of the current international relationships because constructivist approaches emphasize the influence of ideas and give them great importance to the prevailing

discourse in society. This is because the discourse not only establishes acceptable behaviors but also reflects and forms beliefs and interests at the same time. This is due to its significance, which can be attributed to two factors: its psychological makeup and its cultural aspect. Both of these factors are influenced by the historical and contemporary mental legacies of the nations and their relationships with one another.⁶

In a different context, constructivist theory literature heavily emphasizes the importance of culture, especially religion. As we've already seen, it helps define and analyze international behaviors. Additionally, it helps civilizations become more conscious by assisting them in defining their identities and "what" and "how" they want. Indeed, this is evident, if only in part, in the British people's unanimity in opposing the EU's policies, their decision to exit the EU, US President Donald TRUMP's "America First" campaign, the loud voices advocating for Russia to reemerge as a belligerent superpower against the West, and the rise of Confucian power in China.⁷

2. Postmodernism Theory

During what was referred to as the third debate in international relations, postmodernism theory first appeared in the field of international relations in the late eighties of the twentieth century. It was dependent upon the writings of influential theorists such as Michael Shapiro, Simone Dily, David Campbell, James Der Dorian, Richard Ashley, and others. The emergence of irrational philosophies, such as surrealism, existentialism, Freudianism, nihilism, etc., and the end of World War II, the start of the Cold War, the spread of nuclear weapons, and the declaration of the birth of human rights, all contributed to the overall context of the time.

The bridge that connected the modernity-era philosophy to the postmodernist philosophy was created by Jack Derrida's deconstructive philosophy. Therefore, postmodern philosophy was mostly understood to be anti-modern and contradictory.⁸

Friedrich Nietzsche, the founder of postmodernism, is regarded by Michael Foucault as one of the three most influential intellectuals who initiated the radical critique of Modernism in the West, along with Freud and Marx. However, Nietzsche is the most critical of all the pillars upon which the entirety of human philosophy is built. This development has a significant impact on the majority of modern ideas.⁹

Since the postmodern approach has been rethinking many concepts and epistemological analytical tools, postmodernism theory concentrated on intensifying epistemological and methodological criticism to destroy the foundations of dominant human thought, which were based on positivist philosophy and rational empirical approaches.

The French scholar Jean-Francois Lyotard supports this point of view in articles like "The Postmodern Situation" (1979), "The Controversy" (1983), and "Postmodern Ethics" (1993). In addition to criticizing Modernism, he made an effort to permanently provide a route for the integration of postmodern philosophy's moral and epistemological concerns.

The idea of analyzing discourse in international relationships has piqued the interest of postmodern theorists, particularly Michael Foucault. According to Foucault, the use of a particular language in international relationships expresses meanings on at least two levels: the superficial meaning, which is that every word has a clear meaning that is known from dictionaries, and the deep meaning, which is that the word is used to convey another word or an implied meaning, and both meanings change as history and culture progress. For instance, the word "crusade" originally referred to European military attempts to conquer the Holy Land during the Middle Ages. However, this original meaning of the word waned over time, and following the events of September 11, 2001, when the US government declared a "crusade" against terrorists, it appeared as though the word had returned to its religious connotations, as the Bush administration anticipated that the term would play a part in stirring up emotions among Americans. However, this word made it easier for the enemies of the United States of America—the leaders of Al-Qaeda, for example—to use it to gather forces to defend what they referred to as "Muslim homes" and to exact revenge on the Crusader victims.

The natural rebirth that Western civilization has been experiencing for more than fifty years is the religious component of postmodern philosophy. Several modern events, such as the mass flight from Western secular cohesions that have drifted away from ethical frameworks and the urge to return to a different school of thought, can be understood via the lens of religion. This acknowledges the critical role that religion plays in influencing the beliefs and behaviors of the human population as a whole.

The need to impose mental restrictions through certain rites and rituals is not the reason for postmodern fascination with religion; this is religiosity, not religion. This theory's contribution is apparent in its attention to neglected and marginalized appeals, which is influenced by postmodernism, as well as in its unique and thought-provoking developments against preexisting interpretive frameworks. This effect may be seen in the rise of many social and political movements that have demands pertaining to religion, particularly in various nations and components of the new global order; these demands are also becoming more prevalent in many former socialist nations and the independent Soviet republics.

Secondly: Religion-Based Proposals in International Relations

Aside from the theories described above, the following will outline a few theoretical suggestions that addressed the religious dimension in international relations.

1. The End of History

The idea that history is coming to an end originated with American-Japanese philosopher Francis Fukuyama. In 1989, Fukuyama wrote an article titled "The End of History and the Last Man" in the magazine *The National Interest*, and in 1992, he

turned that article into a book. Fukuyama intended to allude to history as a space for the placement of great ideas and their philosophical-dialectical growth, not as that time space with all of its events, facts, accomplishments, and discoveries. Because it is the final and authoritative manifestation of the accumulation of human intellect, the statement "History has ended" thus signifies the end of ideologies and the recognition that the last man will always reside in the arms of liberal democracy.

Contrary to Huntington's theory, Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History and the End of Humankind" thesis centered on the end of conflict and difference after what was achieved by economic and political liberalism, the wide spread and hegemony achieved by Western civilization, and its supremacy over the world as one model for all humanity to follow.

Fukuyama's theory of the end of history is based on his conviction that liberal democracy is a legitimate form of government, particularly in light of the overthrow of communist governments in Russia and Eastern Europe. Therefore, he views liberal democracy as the beginning of the end of human conceptual growth and as the pinnacle of human administration; liberalism signifies the end of history.

The phrase "end of history" that Fukuyama appropriated from "Hegel" and "Marx" refers to the point at which humankind reached a society that satisfies fundamental needs. By this, he means that political systems and material development have advanced to the point where they can no longer be further advanced, provided these central problems are resolved.¹⁰

According to Fukuyama, the core of all conflicts in the new world is the need for recognition, or "Themos". In other words, Fukuyama believes that the only things lacking from the new global order that the Western civilizational model—crowned with its victory—are its universality and civilization. Nonetheless, non-Western domains of civilization fiercely oppose the universality of Western culture and its new global order. Accordingly, he makes an implied admission in his book "The End of History": "People in the past rejected liberalism because they believed that monarchy, aristocracy, theocracy, religious government, communism, and other ideologies, are better. There are no ideological fighters for liberal democracy. But as of as moment, everyone agrees—aside from the Islamic world.

Fukuyama thinks that liberalism was presented as a worldwide human endeavor with the end of the Cold War. Other than a small, localized opposition, which he saw mostly coming from Islam, which is said to have its own moral code and views on social and political justice, he did not perceive any opposition to the liberal notion. It's possible that Islam appeals to people everywhere because it views all other people as wicked. Fukuyama, however, confirms the resilience and universality of Arab civilization as well as its superiority over all other civilizations, particularly in light of the fact that Islam has recently been increasingly influenced by Western ideals over time. This is what prompted Huntington to warn against Fukuyama's thesis, in which he sees a danger to Western civilization, because it is a kind of vanity.¹¹

According to Fukuyama, Islam has evolved into the true opponent of Western Christian culture as a civilization and set of values since the fall of the communist bloc, and as such, the West must lead the fight against it. "The current conflict is not a simple battle against terrorism, nor against Islam as a religion and civilization, but rather it is a struggle against the fundamentalist Islamic faith that stands in opposition to the Western modernity," Fukuyama stated in an interview with Newsweek. The United States of America faces an intellectual challenge that is, in some ways, more fundamental than the threat posed by communism, rather than just fighting a small band of terrorists in the sea of Islamic enslavement in which terrorists swim..¹²

Through these concepts, it becomes evident that Fukuyama believes that the conflict between the globally dominant Western civilization and Islam—which, in his view, represents a significant global barrier to American democracy—will have a civilized and religious component.

2. Clash of Civilizations thesis

At the end of the Cold War, a set of theses surfaced. They recognize how drastically international relations have changed. Rather than being grounded on shared economic interests, they cast a negative and pessimistic light on the violent conflicts that exist between the civilizations. Among the most well-known figures to discuss the thesis of the collision of civilizations is Professor Samuel Huntington.

The concept of a collision of civilizations first appeared in a brief piece that was printed in an American magazine in 1993. Since the publication of this journal, Samuel Huntington's piece has had the most readership. A few years later, Huntington wrote a book based on his article, in which he provided a thorough explanation of his hypothesis and provided evidence for everything the article described.¹³

Samuel Huntington argues in "The Clash of Civilizations" that national disputes driven by political, ideological, or even economic grounds will not be the causes of the hostilities that will occur between nations; rather, these battles will be between civilizations for reasons of culture and religion. Because he makes a distinction between different civilizations according to religion, he also draws on the broad notion that civilizations had a significant and useful influence on the map of world politics throughout the post-Cold War period. In his view, there are numerous signs that the overall pattern of international relations processes supports the notion that the world community is heading toward structuring based on separated civilizations along religious, linguistic, and cultural lines.¹⁴ The religious factor, which is considered as one of the strongest factors driving peoples and conflicts, became a source of a set of geopolitical and geo-cultural movements and tremors in today's world,¹⁵ which indicates that conflict, in light of the New World Order, will turn from an ideological and economic conflict into a conflict of religions and cultures. According to Huntington, there are far more profound distinctions between civilizations than those that stem from rivalry within the system of civilizations, and a

state's level of development or regression can be explained by its cultural context and religious affiliation.

According to Huntington, the foundation of the new global order will be civilizational diversity, from which societies with common religious and cultural bonds and a spirit of cooperation will emerge. The West's claims to globalism and humanity will, in turn, put it at odds with other civilizations.¹⁶

Because the world is becoming smaller and more interconnected, Huntington thinks that there is a greater chance of civilizational conflict as a result of globalization, which also enhances awareness of challenges posed by religious and cultural differences. He underlined that conflicts between civilizations on the international scale are rooted in religion, hence he concentrated a lot on the religious aspect of international relations. The role of religion in the world war will become increasingly significant.¹⁷

Regarding the collision of civilizations, Alvin and Heidi Toffler concur with Huntington. Both of them stressed that since everyone is an important part of the new global order, there is no need for documentation regarding the growing impact of religions, from Islam to Russian Orthodoxy, to the quickly growing sects of the current day.

According to Huntington, the West's political and economic hegemony over the rest of the world, along with its desire to further establish this dominance in religious and cultural spheres, are the main causes of the pattern of civilizational conflict in the post-Cold War world. These factors may cause other non-Western civilizations to react negatively and resist, which the West rejects, ultimately leading to civilizational conflict. Huntington uses the split between Islamic and Western civilizations as one of his examples because he thinks that antagonism between these two societies has persisted for centuries and is unlikely to go away—in fact, it might even get stronger. In addition, the spread of Western democracy in the Arab world will strengthen, in his opinion, the arrival of forces opposing the West, which made him consider the interaction between Islam and the West as a clash of civilizations.¹⁸

According to Huntington, civilization will serve as the cornerstone of the new global order. It will comprise economic blocs that share a shared identity, which is the key to their prosperity. Huntington gave instances of these coalitions, such as the Caribbean group, which consists of thirteen former British territories. Regarding the overall structure of the collision, he predicts that it will occur between five major civilizations, including¹⁹:

- Western civilization: includes North America and Western Europe. It was formed from the extension of Christianity and relied mainly on secularism;
- Confucian Buddhist civilization: includes China and those living in the diasporas;
- The Orthodox Civilization: includes Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe. In this civilization, the domination of the Orthodox Church is obvious;
- Hindu civilization: includes India and some countries close to it;

- Islamic Civilization: It includes all the countries which members profess the religion of Islam.

Huntington claims that other civilizations, whose beliefs view Western principles and ideals as corrupt and decadent, will present challenges to the West's ambition to hold its position as the dominant force in the post-Cold War world. This will establish a countervailing trend in the global order, predicated on coalitions with non-Western entities, specifically the Confucian-Islamic alliance.²⁰

Thirdly: Religious Dimension in Current International Issues

Religion, which Snyder described as "older than the state [with] its aims encompassing not just politics but all of life," is nevertheless crucial to the formulation of public policy and has long regarded as "one of the basic forces of the social universe." The religious element became increasingly apparent due to a number of global occurrences. It made academics and politicians aware of how religion influences public opinion and governmental policy.

Without a doubt, religion forms the foundation of any society's value system since it contains fundamental ideas that establish boundaries for what is acceptable or unacceptable, right or wrong, and good or bad. These ideas are unchangeable truths that cannot be argued or compromised. Therefore, religious differences lead sometimes to the use of violence or make existing conflicts difficult to resolve.

It might be argued that religions play important roles in international affairs. Every historical stage and every kind of concentrated international actor has an impact on the quantity, quality, and areas of prominence of different religions. The relevance of religion and its involvement in both domestic and international conflicts grew in the post-Cold War era. Questions of meaning for the emerging international order and identity for the newly formed countries emerged as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the countries of the eastern camp.

In modern societies, the invocation of culture and religion has always been entwined with intricate concerns of identification as a means of constructing the identities of governments and groups that are national, ethnic, and religious. Religious heritage and religion have been used by political and cultural elites to distinguish between "the others" and "We." As a result, religious organizations and their leaders gained more weight within domestic power structures and played larger roles and more impact in international interactions and conflicts. However, the most challenging aspect of this kind of conflict is that it centers on material matters, where religious fervor and hatred are crucial components.

Religious teachings serve as the foundation for the political ideologies of a large number of political movements and parties that exist in today's globe. These parties are prevalent throughout the Arab-Islamic world, and this is also the case in Western Europe, where the Christian Democratic parties are growing. Fundamentalist Jewish parties like "Mafdal," "Shas," "Judaism," and "HaTorah" are being propagated

by Zionists in Israel. Similarly, Christian right-wing pressure groups control the Republican and Democratic party leaders in the United States. 21

Western research circles attest to the growing importance of religion, particularly in light of its important role in the majority of today's global conflicts. In addition to acting as a catalyst for ethnic conflict, such as the Balkan Wars, religion can also act as a multiplier in religious conflict, as in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Ethnic and religious conflicts can also arise. Examples of these include the war between the Buddhist majority in Sri Lanka and the Muslim Rohingya minority in Burma, as well as the struggle of the Shahis Hindus against them..22

We observe that religion has become a more significant element in international politics, particularly American politics. Adopting this component proved essential to comprehending how international events unfolded. Although the role of religion in American politics is not new, it has always held a prominent place in the country's foreign political theory, particularly in the early 1970s. As the American war against communism and the Soviet Union deepened throughout this decade, it became evident to them that religion had a significant role to play in this conflict. As a result, the "religious belt" policy was established. This later implies that in order to oppose the Soviet Union's concepts of socialism and atheism as well as to battle against religions, morality, and fundamental values, religious movements, both Islamic and Christian, should be energized both domestically and abroad in collaboration with the Soviet Union's neighbors.

The events that transpired in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks demonstrated the significant influence of religion on global relations. The United States of America serves as a paradigmatic case in this regard, not only because of the emergence of the alliance between neoconservatives and the Christian right, which has consistently sided with Israel due to beliefs about the return of Christ and the ultimate conflict between Good and Evil, but also because American Protestantism has Jewish roots..23

The use of religious terms like the "axis of evil" and "the Crusades" by US President George W. Bush, as well as his description of American soldiers as an army of mercy and his remarks that "you all know that the power of faith can change life," all contributed to an increase in religious extremism in his talks and speeches. Next came the American policy effort, which linked the problem to the free world's animosity toward terrorism and named seven terrorist nations, five of which were Islamic: "Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Sudan"; the other two were North Korea and Cuba. The catchphrase used to fight communism during the Cold War has been replaced with the slogan of the war on terrorism. This is demonstrated by the wars that the US fought in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, both of which were fought under the guise of battling Al-Qaeda and featured the US motto "Peace be upon you, Oh Mary." Following that, especially in light of the 2011 Arab Spring events, conducting military operations in Libya and Syria under the pretext of

neutralizing the terrorist threat and enforcing an embargo on Sudan and Iran on the pretext of endorsing terrorism ²⁴, then interest in the religious issue in international relations shifted to the ranks of traditional issues, such as the struggle for influence and power, the arms race, and the processes of regional integration, following the emergence of The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) in 2014 and the shift in the nature of the terrorist threat it caused by the formation of regional and international alliances to confront it.

However, it has been said that Russia's foreign policy, one of the nations that competes most with the United States of America, affirms the significance of religion in today's international relations. When one reads the four editions of the Russian international policy literature "concept or belief," which was released in 1993, 2000, 2008, and 2013, one discovers that it diagnoses the state of the world and identifies the central ideas, motifs, and concerns of Russian politics, whether they relate to particular problems or areas that demand more attention. The previous two editions (2008 and 2013) demonstrate how the cultural and religious element is increasingly influencing Russian policy orientations and priority-setting.. According to the 2013 document, "global competition at the civilizational level" is described in modern history for the first time as common human values. Russia is portrayed in the text as an example of polite coexistence and cultural variety. The two versions made clear reference to the Orthodox Church by highlighting the importance of engaging in active communication with it, endorsing its initiatives in fostering interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and tackling religious intolerance.²⁵ Combating prejudice based on religion. Thus, based on the foregoing, we may conclude that the start of the third century unequivocally shown that religions cannot be totally eradicated or removed from the global landscape, which is compatible with the well-known adage in the United States that reads, "Announcing the death of God is premature."²⁶

Conclusion

As a conclusion, it can be stated that, in contrast to all the trends and theses put forth by scholars who supported the position and significance of religion as a logical foundation for understanding international interactions under the post-Cold War international order, theses have emerged confirming that, in the new international order, interactions take the form of conflicts over interests, whether they are cooperative or antagonistic, even when they appear to be different from reality. We are able to arrive at the following conclusions:

First, the rise of intellectual currents calling for a reconsideration of the religious and value dimensions in the study of international relations, and the emergence of what we can refer to as the religious perspective, can be attributed to developments in the modern world, particularly since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the communist camp, which was noted for its absence of the religious and moral aspect in the examination and research of global connections.

Second, given the nature of contemporary international relations, the religious element has undoubtedly assumed a more prominent role. This is evidenced by a

variety of indicators, the most notable of which is probably the emergence of several states founded primarily on religion, including Iran, Afghanistan, and other nations, as well as the abundance of transnational religious currents and groups that are not exclusive to any one religion. Instead, it encompassed a wide range of world religions, as well as numerous philosophical systems like Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Shintism, as well as what was called the "religious awakening" or fundamentalist tide in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Additionally, it included the growing influence of these systems in the formulation and shaping of international policy, which could spark a clash of civilizations between the various warring nations.

Third, the idea that religion has a monopoly on relations between nations is rejected by a large number of international relations specialists and scholars. They contend that, in determining a nation's foreign policy, morals and religion lag behind interests, notwithstanding their relative significance. Thus, in today's world, the core components of conflict between nations are pragmatism and interest.

Margins:

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