
U.S. FOREIGN POLICY &
INTERNATIONAL
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEXT
PRESIDENT

OCTOBER 11, 2016

OVERVIEW

Please find attached a preliminary summary of a forthcoming report on U.S. foreign policy and international religious freedom co-authored by the Religious Freedom Institute's Dr. Thomas F. Farr and the Institute for Global Engagement's Dr. Dennis R. Hoover. While people may have different views about these recommendations, our hope is to catalyze a conversation about this vital issue. We are unanimous in:

- Recalling that religious freedom is a non-partisan value of Americans, fundamental to America's founding and self-understanding, resulting in the unanimous passage of the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998; and,
- Supporting the combined effect of the attached recommendations to deepen and expand America's institutional and individual capacity to preserve, protect and promote the freedom to believe or not, and if one believes, to engage in public life on the basis of their religious values, including in public policy debates.

Here is what we know from our personal experience:

- 75% of the world's population lives in a context where their freedom of conscience is restricted, even as religion is used to validate narratives that condone and expect violence (from ISIS to the 969 movement in Burma to Russia's foreign policy, among many examples); and,
- Where there is more religious freedom—as consistent with the Golden Rule found in every faith and culture—there is more political stability, more economic development, more women's empowerment, and less violent religious extremism, precisely because people and communities of faith are free to contribute to the common good (from caring for the orphan and widow to standing against corruption and extremism in their own ranks).”

Religious freedom is not only the right thing to do, it's in our self-interest. Here are some highlights from the following report that we consider important:

- *Implement (and amend where necessary) the existing U.S. Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement worldwide:*
 - Deepen and expand the U.S. State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom to include better coordination between the IRF office and the Office of Religion & Global Affairs, ensuring that highly qualified individuals are appointed to lead these efforts;
 - Institutionalize similar offices throughout the executive branch, particularly at the Department of Defense, beginning with the requirement for Combatant Commanders worldwide to have an annex to their theater engagement plan that

supports the U.S. Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement

- *Encourage America's civil society to participate in these discussions:*
 - Re-establish (and/or create) the Federal Advisory Committee for Strategic Dialogue with American civil society, at the State Department, and at other relevant agencies; and,
 - Re-engage with the International Religious Freedom Roundtable, a Capitol Hill forum of NGOs that meets regularly to discuss the issue.

U.S. Foreign Policy and International Religious Freedom: Recommendations for the Next President

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Issue

- The International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA), signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1998, established a mandate to advance freedom of religion worldwide using the tools of U.S. foreign policy.
- Religious freedom is valued highly by Americans and most foreign publics (if not their governments or religious leaders) and is affirmed in international law. Advancing this fundamental human right is a matter of justice.
- International religious freedom (IRF) is also an international security issue. Its absence is associated with religious terrorism and instability. Its presence is necessary for stable democracy, including civil society, economic growth, and social harmony.

The Problem

- U.S. IRF policy to date has focused more on rhetorical denunciations of persecutors and releasing religious prisoners than on facilitating the political and cultural institutions necessary to religious freedom. Accordingly, U.S. policy has had minimal effect on global levels of persecution and even less on the institutions of religious freedom.
- U.S. IRF policy is often viewed abroad as an attack on majority religious communities, as cultural imperialism, and as a front for American missionaries. However inaccurate, these perceptions have dramatically curtailed the policy's impact.
- U.S. IRF policy has not been fully integrated into U.S. programs on democracy promotion, public diplomacy, countering violent religious extremism (CVRE) and counterterrorism, or multilateral diplomacy and international law.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Set a Clear Policy Priority

- The President and Secretary of State should publicly proclaim that U.S. IRF policy:
 - is vital to U.S. interests in the world, including our quest for justice and our defense of American security.
 - will be expanded under the next administration to address sympathetically the religion-state problems faced by societies transitioning to democracy, and to address the needs of majority, as well as minority, religious communities.
 - will be integrated into democracy promotion, public diplomacy, CVRE, and multilateral strategies.

Retool Foreign Policy Institutions Related to Freedom of Religion

- Within the new administration’s first wave of appointments, appoint an IRF Ambassador-at-Large with experience in foreign policy *and* religious freedom, one capable of integrating IRF into other policy areas.
- Concurrent with the ambassadorial appointment, either (a) appoint a director of the State Department Office of Religion and Global Affairs (RGA) with broad experience and expertise in religion, religious freedom, diplomacy, security, and peacebuilding, and whose understanding and approach to key issues is complementary to that of the IRF Ambassador, or (b) “double-hat” the IRF Ambassador as RGA director.
- If option A is chosen, institute a review and optimization of the collaboration and division of responsibility between the RGA and the Office of International Religious Freedom (OIRF).
- Ensure the IRF Ambassador reports directly to the Secretary of State, and the OIRF within the office of the Secretary, as IRFA intended.
- Institute a religion/religious freedom subspecialty under the political, economic, and public diplomacy career tracks for Foreign Service Officers.
- Mandate, in the President’s letter of instruction to U.S. ambassadors, the allocation of embassy resources to engage religious actors, ideas, and communities, and to advance religious freedom broadly understood.
- Require every U.S. mission abroad, and every regional bureau at the Department of State, to develop a religious freedom strategy as part of its annual program planning.
- Require more direct collaboration between the State Department’s regional bureaus and the Office of International Religious Freedom
- Encourage the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to monitor the administration’s progress toward integrating IRF policy into the mainstream of foreign policy.
- Encourage more active involvement by Congress in the conduct of US IRF policy—for example, by holding oversight hearings on the operation of the policy and establishing subcommittees on IRF policy within the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.
- Strengthen the process of designating countries as “countries of particular concern,” especially by requiring more substantive *policy actions* (not just rhetoric) focused on CPCs.
- Support initiatives of the U.S. IRF Commission such as a fellows program, and encourage greater communication and collaboration between the Commission and other foreign policy institutions.

Reenergize Attention to Religious Freedom within U.S. Programs Promoting Democracy, Civil Society, and Human Rights

- Integrate religious freedom into all U.S. democracy planning and programs, such as those at the U.S. Agency for International Development and the National Endowment for Democracy.
- Integrate the office of the IRF Ambassador-at-Large into all strategic and operational decisions regarding democracy promotion and programming.

- Develop a strategy and commit resources to expanding and diversifying the global “IRF constituency.” Support, via foreign aid and democracy funding, religious and secular nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) around the world who seek to advance religious freedom as part of democratic development.
- Encourage nations and multilateral institutions that have been supportive of IRF to integrate IRF strategies into democracy and civil society programs.

Make Public Diplomacy More Attentive to Religious Freedom

- Encourage institutions such as the U.S. Commission on IRF to provide resources on IRF to public diplomacy officials. Likewise, should the White House Advisory Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (or something like it) continue under the next administration, this body should address these issues and work with the National Security Council to advance religious freedom and foster interfaith dialogue with leaders and scholars around the world.
- Appoint public diplomacy leaders who understand the significance of religious liberty in America and abroad. Public diplomacy leadership calls for more than communications and marketing credentials.
- Ensure that expertise on the relevance of religious freedom to public diplomacy is present in the State Department’s regional bureaus.
- Ensure U.S. public diplomacy officials are familiar with theological principles within various religious traditions that support civil society and constitutional government.
- Seek the counsel of religious individuals and NGOs with experience in target cultures. Maintain the Department of State’s Federal Advisory Committee working group on religious freedom, stability, and foreign policy.
- Encourage existing public and private diplomatic institutions to increase interfaith dialogues and exchanges.
- Ensure freedom of religion is a regular feature in Voice of America and other public diplomacy outlets.

Employ Religious Freedom in Promoting Human Security and Countering Violent Religious Extremism (CVRE)

- Establish under the aegis of the National Security Adviser an interagency task force to examine how IRF policy can contribute to diplomatic CVRE strategies. Issue a national security directive integrating IRF policy into CVRE policy.
- Provide a representative from the State Department IRF office to all CVRE agencies. The IRF Ambassador-at-Large should serve as a Special Assistant to the President on religion and national security issues. Assign a senior advisor on CVRE to the IRF Ambassador-at-Large.
- Seek the counsel of religious actors and groups who have deep experience in target cultures, as well as American-based clerics and scholars, in order to increase American understanding of extremist and terrorist groups and how to defeat them.

- Strengthen and expand education programs (both required and elective courses/seminars) focused on religious freedom among foreign policy, defense, and intelligence personnel with the US government.
- Encourage the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to continue and expand its efforts to study the effects of religious freedom on religious extremism.

Engage Multilateral Institutions and International Law Related to Freedom of Religion

- Maintain and expand U.S. leadership on religious freedom in multilateral institutions. Strengthen existing UN institutions that have specialized expertise on religious freedom. Place a senior IRF official in the U.S. mission to the UN.
- Give strong symbolic and substantive support to coalitions of like-minded countries and multilateral bodies promoting religious freedom. Examples include the Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief at the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights; the European Parliament Intergroup on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Religious Tolerance; the International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief; the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief; and the Commonwealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion or Belief.
- Increase the administration's commitment to international human rights monitoring institutions, including those that monitor and report on human rights and religious freedom in the United States.
- Internationalize the President's "bully pulpit" with respect to religious freedom promotion. The next president should seek opportunities to speak jointly with other world leaders about religious freedom as a universal human right.
- Develop programs in key countries to educate religious groups and lawyers about victim's rights under international law and about complaint and reporting mechanisms available to them within international institutions.