

## **American Foreign Policy Desecularization in the Context of the Worldwide Resurgence of Religion**

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Key research and governmental institutions at the core of American foreign policymaking were entirely secular up until the end of the Cold War. Since the mid-1990s however most have undergone a gradual process of ‘desecularization’. What do I mean by this? Before the 1990s the foreign policy departments of universities such as Georgetown and Harvard; prominent think tanks like the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and Brookings; and foreign policy bureaucracies such as the Department of State, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of Defence and the White House; all rarely, if ever, engaged openly and directly with religious issues in international politics. Today they do.

Most of the above institutions, and their leadership, have increasingly produced reports, prepared policy documents, hosted conferences and delivered speeches on matters concerning religion in international politics. Some have focused on the role of religious freedom in democracy promotion (DepartmentOfState 2009; NSS 2002; CFR 2010). Others have explored the impact of religious actors and ideas on development and conflict-resolution (USAID 2009a, 2009b; WhiteHouse 2010; CSIS 2007). Others have promoted sustained engagement and dialogue among religions traditions for international peace and stability (Obama 2009; WhiteHouse 2010; Appleby, Cizik, and Wright 2010). Concerns surrounding the nexus between religion and national security are also ever present (NSS 2002). New centres, departments, and personnel appointments – with clear policy guidelines and outcomes - have been created in universities, think tanks and foreign policy bureaucracies with the aim of ‘outreaching’, ‘supporting’, ‘financing’, ‘researching’, ‘understanding’, ‘engaging’, ‘mitigating’, ‘reducing’ or ‘harnessing’ religious forces according to American national interests and foreign policy goals.

It is worth making a caveat here. I am not suggesting that religion has never been present in American foreign policy before, while instead today it is. This would be terribly short-sighted, as the two have a long entangled history (Preston 2006; Bellah 1986). Indeed, much has been written about America’s protestant roots and how these influence its sense of identity, its understanding as an exceptional nation, as a city upon a hill, with a particular mission in the world (Lieven 2005; Kurth 1998; Boyle 2004; Bellah 2006b; Judis 2005). Presidents such as Woodrow Wilson, Harry Truman, Jimmy Carter, and George W. Bush have drawn from their own personal faith and religious beliefs when confronted and taking important foreign policy decisions (Espinosa 2009; Singer 2004; Preston 2006). Likewise presidents have

recurred, across time and space, to religious rhetoric and symbols to frame American foreign policy, describe its enemies and friends, and mobilize domestic support (Inboden 2008; Prodromou 2008). Domestic religious groups and movements have also had longstanding concerns and interest in foreign affairs (Ribuffo 2001; Abrams 2001; Marsden 2008; Mead 2006). American support for religiously inspired movements abroad was common practice during the Cold War as was the case with Solidarnosc in Poland and the Mujahidin in Afghanistan (Westad 2007).

Religion clearly has never really been divorced from American foreign policy. What I am suggesting however is that a qualitative and quantitative shift has happened since the 1990s onwards leading to the emergence of discourses, departments and policies with an *explicit* and *direct* focus on religious issues and actors, across a wide-range of American foreign policymaking institutions. As Elizabeth Prodromou points out: “a periodization of U.S. foreign policy after the Cold War shows a gradual yet discernible shift in the salience of religion, both domestically and internationally” (Prodromou 2008, , p.299). This ‘gradual yet discernible shift in the salience of religion’ is what I have defined as foreign policy desecularization. But what is exactly happening and why? In other words, why is the process of institutional desecularization occurring and what are the forces responsible for it?

A central claim of this paper [and the broader research the paper is part of] is that one would be hard pressed to fully account for the process of American foreign policy desecularization, without examining the broader trends and changing social structural context within which these institutional shifts are taking place. What I mean is that religion ‘matters’ more to American foreign policy because it ‘matters’ more globally. In fact, a key trend over the past decades has been the so-called global resurgence of religion. That is religious actors, discourses, ideologies and identities have actually gained in political salience worldwide rather than disappearing under the supposedly secularizing onward march of modernity. Hence, I would argue, the desecularization of American foreign policy can be understood as a consequence of what Peter Berger has labelled the “desecularization of the world” (Berger 1999).

With the resurgence of religion, religious actors and identities have come to matter more both externally and domestically for the United States. Externally two elements impinge on American foreign policy. First, various forms of Islamist movements and ideologies have become a central national security concern for Washington over the past decades (Gerges 1999; Gerges and MyiLibrary. 2005). Second, America’s global reach exposes its military, diplomatic and development operations to locations where political and social systems are deeply and increasingly entangled with religion (Thomas 2010). Domestically instead, the global religious revival manifests itself in the social and political mobilization and lobbying activity of a heterogeneous ‘political Christian’ movement, which combines conservative Christian Right and more progressive Christian Left actors (Green, Jones, and Cox 2009).

Domestic and external religious forces that are putting pressure on American foreign policy institutions have come into existence with the global religious resurgence. Yet these cannot alone explain the institutional changes occurring. Structures in fact enable and constrain, they permit certain outcomes, but alone cannot causally explain change and actions (Dessler 1989, p.452-453; Wendt 1987, p.362). In order to explain outcomes, in this case the desecularization of American foreign policy research and

governmental organizations we need to locate the efficient causes of action among agents. The causal link between macro-level processes of global religious resurgence and the institutional changes occurring at the meso-level, are traceable to the actions of agents (themselves embedded within or responding to macro social structures) at the micro-level. The agents which are directly responsible for mainstreaming religion within American foreign policy are what I will call, drawing from the work of Vyacheslav Karpov, ‘desecularizing agents’ (Karpov 2010).

It is important to note that foreign policy desecularization is a highly political and contentious process. First, institutions, especially governmental ones, are highly conservative and, absent particular shocks or crises in domestic or global politics, they overwhelmingly tend to support the status quo. Even if such favourable conditions for change materialize, entrenched governmental, political, economic and parochial interests create further barriers to change (Hook 2008, p.151). Secondly, mainstreaming religious ideas, understandings, actors and practices within the implementation of foreign policy is a normatively problematic endeavour. It increasingly blurs established and entrenched norms on the separation of faith and politics and church and state. Hence while desecularization agents proceed to mainstream their religiously inspired concerns and norms, these often engender opposition from political actors and movements with opposed secular beliefs (Smith 2003).

This paper proceeds as follows. In the first section, I review the scholarly literature on how structures and agents, and external and domestic forces affect foreign policy change – in this precise case institutional change. The second section examines the theoretical and empirical debates taking place in parallel among sociologists, political scientists, political philosophers and international relations scholars on the global processes of religious resurgence. I explore here how these macro social changes have brought to the fore religious forces in American domestic and international politics. As a result, these structural shifts have opened up space for the emergence of a series of agents with particular concerns about religion in international politics. The third part takes a closer look at the key agents pressuring to mainstream their foreign policy related religious ideas in Washington D.C. The fourth part examines in more detail the discursive, institutional and policy shifts occurring in key foreign policy universities, think tanks and bureaucracies. The paper concludes by discussing general findings and their implications for theoretical debates about the role of religion in IR and the future of U.S. foreign policy.

### **Theoretical Framework: Structures and Agents in Foreign Policy**

The central premise of much Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) is that the system level structures which IR scholars spend much time in theorizing (Bull 1977; Waltz 1979; Wendt 1999), have limited explanatory power when it comes to explaining states’ behavior. FPA authors argue that structures do not *cause* states’ foreign policy outcomes; only agent-oriented and actor-specific theories can satisfactorily account for states’ international actions and policies (Hudson 2005; Hudson 2007). Hence, the key insight of FPA is to open the ‘black box’ of the state and explain foreign policy outcomes by examining the decision-making processes of key actors through a variety of rational (McGinnis 1994), cognitive (Jervis 1976), bureaucratic (Allison and

Zelikow 1999), or domestic politics (Evans, Jacobson, and Putnam 1993) theoretical approaches.

FPA scholars' critique of the overly-structural nature of mainstream IR theory is a sound one. Nevertheless it seems to have pushed the pendulum too far the other way. Much theoretical and empirical work within FPA, in fact, has ended up ignoring all too often the broader structural and historical context actors in the international system are a part of and respond to. States, state-bureaucracies, and non-state actors are not simply free floating agents operating in a vacuum. The material, ideational and social forces structuring the environment within which they operate will inevitably have an influence on the interests and beliefs these actors have and the choices they make. Rosati, Hagan, and Sampson bring in a more complex and multilayered picture: "the actual evolution of foreign policy is a function of politics. It is the political interplay between the government, society, and global environment that generates and affects foreign policy continuity and change" (Rosati, Hagan, and Sampson 1994, p.274). Christopher Hill likewise notes that "the political, bureaucratic and social structures which condition foreign-policy making are of vital importance" (Hill 2003, p.27)

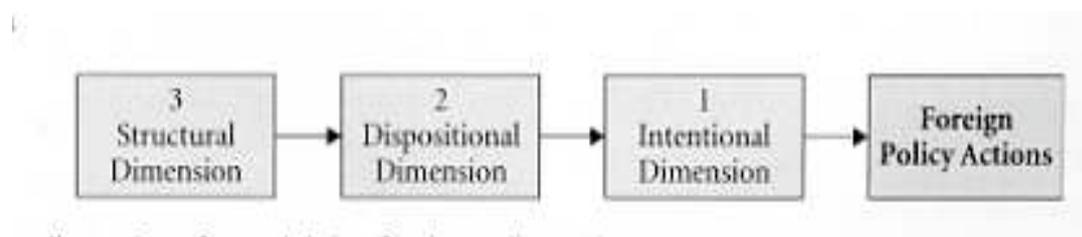
Hence accounts of foreign policy change that are solely linked to the decision-making process of individual agents are somewhat partial. To have a more complete explanatory causal picture these should take into consideration the larger forces at play and explore how these relate across levels. As Christopher Hill argues: "foreign policy-making is a complex process of interaction between many actors, differently embedded in a wide range of different structures" (Hill 2003, p.28). As such "causation" - in foreign policy - "always involves both structures and agencies" (Hill 2003, , p.26). By having an understanding of how agents and structures are linked, opens the door to conceptualizing processes of foreign policy change in terms of both structural possibilities and human choice.

Theoretical work across theoretical paradigms seeking to avoid falling prey to the actor-centered reductionism of many FPA approaches or to the structural determinism of standard IR is an interesting recent development within the discipline. Among realists, a new generation of neoclassical realist has come to the fore. These scholars explain individual state behavior by focusing on the interaction between system-level material variables (anarchy and polarity), with domestic material variables (institutions, pressure groups, elites, and party politics), on the one hand, and ideational ones (culture, identity, and ideas), on the other hand (Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009). David Patrick Houghton argues for a closer collaboration among structural constructivist IR theories and agent-centered cognitive psychological approaches to FPA (Houghton 2007). Houghton reflects on how "the notion that a theory of IR must be kept separate from a theory of foreign policy is a [...] myth that makes no sense if structures and agents are assumed to be mutually constituted" (2007, p.41).

Bryan Mabee, using an international historical sociological (IHS) perspective, builds a micro historical-institutionalist approach to foreign policy analysis that moves beyond the standard IHS' focus on macro structures and takes into consideration the actions of individual agents (Mabee 2007). By explaining the origins and developments of institutions and bureaucracies 'with international functions', Mabee seeks to connect

the FPA decision-making processes of domestic agents at the micro-level with the historical context and macro-social structural trends within which individual and collective actors are embedded in (2007, p.443).

Most of all, it is Walter Carlsnaes who has aimed at building an integrative framework which theorizes the dynamic interaction over time between structures and agents across levels of analysis in order to explain foreign policy outcomes (Carlsnaes 1992, 1993, 2008). Carlsnaes builds an analytical framework that explains the actions leading to particular foreign policy changes across three distinct explanatory dimensions: i) intentional dimension; ii) dispositional dimension; and iii) structural dimension (see graph below from Carlsnaes 2008, p.97). These three dimensions are analytically autonomous, yet closely linked in a “logical, step-by-step manner to produce increasingly exhaustive (or ‘deeper’) explanations of foreign policy actions” (Carlsnaes 2008, p.97).



The intentional dimension is the level at which the preferences in terms of interests actors hold and choices in terms of strategies actors make, in relation to a particular foreign policy outcome, are examined (Carlsnaes 2008, 1992). At this level, explanations can be provided by using rational choice analysis and empirically oriented descriptions of intentional behaviour by tracing decision-making processes (Carlsnaes 1992). The dispositional dimension focuses on how particular actors come to hold their specific policy preferences and interests. It explores what are the relevant belief systems and perceptions which dispose them towards certain policy preferences and informs their particular intentional behaviour (Carlsnaes 2008, 1992). Here the attention is on the psychological-cognitive aspects of actors how they see and understand the world around them.

Compared to the intentional dimension, which is mainly concerned with explaining causation (through process tracing and historical narration), the dispositional dimension requires a different methodology. To assess the ‘perceptions’, ‘cognitive images’ or ‘beliefs’ held by actors, discourse and content analysis are valuable methodological tools. A pluralist methodological and epistemological stance which combines explanation and understanding - causation and constitution – is of essence here (Wendt 2001; Lupovici 2009). Pleas for methodological pluralism that can combine causal and interpretative explanations are widespread also within FPA (Hill 2003; Hook 2008; Houghton 2007).

The final dimension in Carlsnaes framework is the structural dimension. Structural factors can be “domestic and international, social, cultural, economic or material” (Carlsnaes 2008, , p.98). Agents are embedded within structures which materially and ideationally constrain and enable their actions. Structures causally affect policy actions via its effects on the dispositional characteristics, the values, preferences,

moods and attitudes, of the agents' (Carlsnaes 2008, 1992). In other words, structural factors are "cognitively mediated by the actors in question rather than affecting policy actions directly" (Carlsnaes 1993, , p.21). Given that structures have an (indirect) effect on foreign policy, one can assume that shifts and changes at the structural level can lead to changes in foreign policy.

### **Desecularizing Structures**

Over the past decades the salience of religion in social and political life appears to have waxed across the world, rather than wane under the supposedly secularizing forces of modernity. A burgeoning cross-disciplinary interest in explaining and understanding this phenomenon has developed among sociologists (Berger 1999; Eisenstadt 2000; Kepel 1994; Casanova 1994; Marty 2003; Smith 2008; Stark 1999), political philosophers (Habermas 2008; Connolly 1999), political scientists (Eickelman and Piscatori 2004; Huntington 1996; Wald, Silverman, and Fridy 2005; Bellin 2008; Shah and Toft 2006) and more recently IR scholars (Hurd 2008; Haynes 2007; Philpott 2002; Fox and Sandler 2006; Hatzopoulos and Petito 2003; Thomas 2005; Barbato and Kratochwil 2009). These have explored a series of non-secularizing processes underway today: the persistence of religious beliefs in societies worldwide, the growing salience of religious actors and movements in domestic and international politics, the growing politicization of religious world-views and ideas, along with the rising presence of religious discourses and identities in the public sphere.

This phenomenon is what authors generally refer to as the 'global resurgence of religion'. It is a relatively recent trend taking place over the past four decades. The 1960s were the period of secularism's maximum influence in politics worldwide (Shah and Toft 2006, p.40). Up until then most social movements, political ideologies and regimes in the (once-called) First, Second and Third World were largely secular in character: from fascist, to socialist, to communist, to liberal and nationalist. Those were also the decades when the most important works on secularization theory was being published by sociologists (Berger 1969; Martin 1978). However since the 1970s onwards, and particularly following the collapse of the Soviet empire, there has been a slow yet discernible retreat from secular politics and a jump in religious vitality across societies around the world. The implications of these macro social changes are as follows: the idea that we live in a fully secularizing world is incorrect, religions are not going to go away as modernization and secularization theories had (erroneously) predicted. To the contrary, a process of religious revivalism is actually taking place worldwide.

For example, from the 1970s onwards, Islamist actors and movements – radical or moderate, violent or peaceful – have become central national and international political players in the Middle East and beyond. Political Islamic movements increasingly contend elections, participate in violent activities, organize revolutions, seek to change social and legal norms, and deliver much needed social services in countries as desperate as Algeria, Egypt, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Philippines and Indonesia (Dalacoura 2002; Ayoob 2008; Kepel 2002; Roy 2004; Eickelman and Piscatori 2004;

Zubaida 1993; Fuller 2004; Adamson 2005). Since 9/11 transnational terrorist groups ideologically infused with distorted Islamic notions of *jihad*, such as Al Qaeda, are among the central security concerns of Americans and Europeans (Gerges 2006; Tibi 2002).

The politicization of religious movements and ideologies is not limited to the Arab and wider Muslim world, but is equally taking place across most religious traditions. In Israel ultra-orthodox settlers and religious right parties such as Shass and Mafdal are major political players and key spoilers in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process (ICG 2009). Politicized evangelicals and Christian Right organizations, which mobilized initially during the 1970s, have sought to actively - and to some degree successfully - shape G.W. Bush administration's foreign policy in the Middle East and aid policy in Africa (Bacevich and Prodromou 2004; Froese and Mencken 2009; Marsden 2008; Mead 2006). Social movements inspired by liberation theology were a fundamental influence in the spread of democracy in Latin America during the 1970s (Philpott 2007). Since the 1960s onwards a socially and politically "engaged Buddhism" has emerged across Asia in countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tibet and Vietnam (Queen and King 1996; Queen, Prebish, and Keown 2003).

In many parts of the world secular conceptions of national identity are increasingly challenged by religious ones. From the 1970s onwards, Arab nationalism is slowly but surely being displaced, on the one hand, by Islamist actors utilizing civilizational discourses centred around a Muslim *ummah* and, on the other hand, by Islamist actors appealing to new forms of Islamic nationalism (Ajami 1992; Zubaida 2004). According to an expanding literature, Turkey's identity is similarly in flux between a weakening secular Kemalist one and emerging Islamist and neo-Ottoman ones backed by the rise to power of the moderate Islamist KDP party (Taspinar 2008; Yavuz 1998; Dai 2005; Ayoob 2004).

In India, the Hindu nationalist party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was formed in the 1980s and came to power in 1998-2004. When it did so it redefined the national interest relying on the concept of *Hindutva* - an amalgam of nationalist and religious concerns - which had foreign policy consequences by shifting India's alliance patterns (Bandyopadhyaya 2003; Haynes 2008). The Zionist secular nationalist identity at the roots of the modern state of Israel, most vividly embodied in the socialist kibbutz, is progressively challenged today by more ethnic and religious oriented forms of Zionism which the orthodox Jewish settlers represent (Cohen and Susser 2000; Rosen 2007; Smootha 2002). Over the past decades, particularly under the presidency of Hu Jintao, China is seeing a revival of Confucianism replacing a withering Maoist state ideology and identity (Fan 2007; Hu 2007; Bell 2008).

As new politicized religious agents and identities emerge, so too cultural and religious discourses have acquired centre stage in the public sphere and international political debates. In Europe the expansion of the European Union to the East, the possibility of incorporating Turkey in its institutional project, its difficulties with a growing immigrant population (often Muslim in character) and the process of drafting a European constitution; all have triggered lively debates concerning European identity and the role of Christianity in that identity (Casanova 2006). Since 9/11 international relations discourses have been infused with religious rhetoric of 'good' versus 'evil' and 'crusaders' versus 'jihadists'. The United Nation's declaration following these

events seemed to suggest that its mission was not limited any more solely to fostering peace among nations, but also to promote a “Dialogue Among Civilizations”<sup>1</sup>. President Obama, soon after his 2008 presidential victory, delivered a speech from Cairo University addressed to an entire religion: the so-called “Muslim World” (Obama 2009). Today in many Muslim-majority countries, religious discourses have become the language of choice both for powerful elites to legitimize their rule and powerless movements to voice their grievances (Eickelman and Piscatori 2004).

These social transformations appear to challenge and weaken secular forms of authority and politics. The distinguished sociologist of religion Peter Berger has argued that the world as a whole is undergoing a process of ‘desecularization’ (Berger 1999). Philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas have discussed the possibility that our societies are turning into ‘post-secular ones (Habermas 2008), while political scientists like Mariano Barbato and Fredrik Kratochwil ponder the possibility of a ‘post-secular’ world order (Barbato and Kratochwil 2009). Martin Marty contends that we live in a ‘religio-secular world’ which is “neither exclusively secular nor religious, but rather a complex combination of both the religious and the secular” (Marty 2003, p.43). Others point at the possibility that some societies, notably in the Middle East, may be retreating from previously taken secular paths (Esposito 2010).

Much of the above work is preoccupied with theorizing the social structural transformations that explain such global shifts in religious and secular politics. Less attention however is paid to specifying how desecularization processes occur and how the secularizing and counter-secularizing dynamics unleashed by actors that are part and parcel of these larger social trends play out on the ground. The role of “human agency, of social actors whose concrete works change religion’s status in various societal domains” is often neglected (Karpov 2010, p.19). The next section aims at bringing back the role of agents, specific social and political actors with their beliefs, interests and the resources they muster, when acting to desecularize American foreign policy.

### **Desecularizing Agents**

The social forces that are responsible for making religious actors, identities, and ideologies more politically salient worldwide, are also causing the desecularization of American foreign policy. They do so by influencing the domestic and external environments within which key foreign policy institutions operate. The structural changes associated with the global resurgence of religion have a causal effect on American institutions through the *dispositions* and *intentions* of specific human agents which are either embedded within or responding to the changing religious social context. These agents can be thought of as ‘desecularizing agents’ (Karpov 2010). Two typologies of desecularizing agents have emerged in the United States, particularly since the 1990s onwards, which are involved in pushing for the adoption of religious-sensitive policies within U.S. foreign policy. These are: ‘desecularizing activists’ and ‘desecularizing elites’. As will be discussed later, the former push to desecularize foreign policy ‘from below’, the latter ‘from above’.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.un.org/Dialogue/>

### *Desecularizing Activists*

Desecularizing activists are “individuals and groups immediately and actively involved in efforts to re-establish religion’s role in societal institutions and culture” (Karpov 2010, p.21). Similarly to other secular activists and networks, such as human rights NGOs (Ropp, Risse-Kappen, and Sikkink 1999), political Christian activists are principally motivated by their (religious) normative convictions and principled beliefs. These activists, which are central promoters of religious norms in American foreign policy, are not free floating. They are part and parcel of a larger Political Christian movement in American society and politics, often identified either with the so-called Christian Right or Christian Left, which first emerged in the 1960s-1970s (Casanova 1994; Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2007; Wilcox 1992; Hudson 2008; Kohut et al. 2000; Wilcox and Fortelny 2009). The Political Christian movement is itself the American expression of larger processes of religious political revivalism occurring worldwide.

The distinction between desecularizing activists and the broader Political Christian movement is an analytically important one. The former are directly and daily involved in advancing their politicized religious agenda in Washington D.C. The former instead is a broader and heterogeneous movement that provides the social and political support base for the activists’ counter-secularizing activities, but is not as directly and actively engaged in lobbying for foreign policy change.

The Political Christian movement, like any other politicized social movement, has fuzzy boundaries that are hard to define with absolute precision. It is not a single unified movement with a central leadership. It is instead highly decentralized and not fully organized, often mobilizing spontaneously. The difficulty of delineating its outward limits is further compounded by the fact that politicized Christian individuals or groups within the United States do not refer to themselves as ‘Political Christians’. The broad galaxy of Political Christianity is composed by organizations which come in all shapes and forms, are driven by a multiplicity of policy issues and span the various Christian denominations from evangelicals to mainline and Catholic. At times their policy concerns overlap, others they differ, occasionally they clash.

The main division is between Christians on the ‘right’ and those on the ‘left’. The former hold a more literal interpretation of scriptures and have overwhelmingly conservative political views. Their religiously informed political ideology tends to put an emphasis on ‘individual morality’ and ‘family values’ (Wilcox 1992; Wilcox and Fortelny 2009; Green, Rozell, and Wilcox 2003; Wilcox and Larson 2006; Green, Jones, and Cox 2009).<sup>2</sup> The latter hold more liberal religious beliefs and have progressive political inclinations. The Christian Left’s political ideology is less concerned with turning individual moral issues into public policy ones. What motivates progressive Christian actors are instead broader ‘peace’ and ‘social justice’

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<sup>2</sup> For example Christian Right (CR) organizations are domestically politically active and campaign against the legalization of abortion, the legalization of same sex marriage, and the spread of pornography. They also push for teaching ‘intelligent design’ (i.e. creationism as opposed to Darwinian evolution theory) in schools and the reinstatement of prayer in public schools. CR activists, like other secular fiscal conservatives in the U.S., are generally opposed to government interventions and are more likely to have an outlook on society and politics which puts individual agents rather than social structures at the centre (Wilcox and Fortelny 2009; Green, Jones, and Cox 2009). Their relentless domestic political activism on issues of education, law, and art has led to what pundits have describe as ‘culture wars’ in American politics and society (Hunter 1991; Nolan 1996).

issues (Wilcox and Fortelny 2009; Green, Jones, and Cox 2009; Hall 1997; Olson 2007).<sup>3</sup> Despite this distinction, political Christians on either side share a common desire to influence politics and policy in accordance to their religious beliefs. They also all strongly support a central a role for religion in public life (Hall 1997, , p.39; Green, Jones, and Cox 2009).

The fact that religion and religious actors are closely woven within the fabric of American political life is not a novel phenomenon. Religion's impact on American politics has a long history which goes back all the way to America's colonization and its founding moments (Tocqueville). And indeed, political religious mobilization has deep roots in American society and is as old as the Republic itself (Noll 2009; Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2007; Regnerus and Smith 1997). If it is issues of continuity, rather than change, which are explored, then one might object to bringing in notions of 'religious resurgence' and 'desecularization' to explain foreign policy changes.

Yet substantial changes have taken place. First of all, in the past four decades the institutionalization of Christian organizations with an explicit aim at influencing public policy in Washington D.C. has grown exponentially. Allen Hertzke, one of the scholars who most closely has traced this trend, points out that: "for most of the nation's history, religious interest group activity was episodic, not institutionalized" compared instead to what is happening today (Hertzke 2009, , p.300). When the first major account of Church lobbying was published in 1950s there were roughly 16 groups with permanent Washington offices (Fowler, Hertzke, and Olson 1999). By the mid-1980s there were at least eighty. By the 1990s Washington hosted more than a hundred religious lobbies and organizations attempting to shape national policy (Fowler, Hertzke, and Olson 1999). At the time Hertzke et al. would remark that "the diversity, scope, and number of religious groups lobbying in Washington has never been greater" (Fowler, Hertzke, and Olson 1999, , p.55). In 2005, *The New York Times* identified some 413 religious institutions involved in Congressional lobbying (Hertzke 2009, , p.304).

A Brookings Institute survey likewise concluded that over the decades "churches and other religious institutions have become more actively engaged in the political process" (Kohut et al. 2000, , p.10). Along with organizations setting up shop inside the Beltway, many other religious interests also increasingly petitioned the government: either by sending delegations or by hiring lobbying firms on their behalf. Not all these interest groups are Christian. Muslim, Jewish, Tibetan Buddhist, and Iranian Baha'is, among others, have also stepped up their Washington presence. However at the centre of this organizational explosion stands Political Christian activism.

A second factor distinguishes the modern Political Christian movement from past religious mobilizations. Their growing institutionalization and deepening political engagement in Washington D.C. is simultaneously accompanied by a broadening of

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<sup>3</sup> For example Christian Left (CL) organizations are domestically politically active and campaign against on issues such as poverty reduction, healthcare provision, social justice and peace, and 'creation care' (i.e. environmental protection). CL actors, as opposed to CR ones, are more likely to blame social and political structures for an individual's misfortune and poverty. As such progressive Christians tend to be more supportive of the government's role in helping the needy and providing healthcare, for example (Wilcox and Fortelny 2009; Green, Jones, and Cox 2009; Hall 1997; Olson 2007).

their political agenda. By the late 1980s Allen Hertke had noticed that: “major changes are afoot, and that religion and politics are more deeply intertwined than at any time in history...what is striking about the current political engagement is its tremendous breath and ideological diversity” (Hertzke 1988, , p.4). More recently Kohut et al. point out that “religious people have increased the level and broadened the range of their political participation”, (Kohut et al. 2000, , p.10). In the past both progressive and conservative religious movements were mainly focused on single issues. For example progressive ones on banning slavery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and conservative ones in resisting the teaching of Darwinism in public schools in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today Political Christian actors however have developed wider political programs that seek to re-order personal morality, combat social injustice, promote particular foreign policies, and specify the role of the government in domestic politics and economics.

Thirdly, the public at large has become seemingly more accepting of the role of religion in shaping today's political landscape. There is a ‘diminishing divide’ between faith and politics in the United States as Americans have grown increasingly tolerant of closer links between religion and politics compared to 30 years ago (Kohut et al. 2000). In 1965 Americans thought that churches should keep out of political matters by a margin of 53% agreeing with the statement to 40% disagreeing with it. In 1996 the balance of opinion had changed. By then 54% of the public thought that churches should express their views on day to day political and social issues, compared to 43% who instead thought they should rather stay out of politics.

As a consequence religion is now a growing force in how Americans think about political candidates and policy issues - as well as politics itself. Until Jimmy Carter “presidents had largely declined to discuss their personal beliefs, now, however...every ambitious politician does so” (Kohut et al. 2000, , p.1). David Domke and Kevin Coe’s work confirms this trend. They have calculated that the use of religious language and references in presidential speeches has increased exponentially from the Reagan years onwards (Domke and Coe 2007). Some argue that the days when “religion and politics where never to be discussed in public are long over” (Kohut et al. 2000, , p.122). The thickening institutionalization of the political Christian movement, their expanding policy agenda and an increasingly supportive public for a bigger role of faith in the public sphere - all point to a growth in the salience of religion in American politics which parallels the resurgence of religion in other societies across the globe.

Up until the 1980s Christian activists within the larger Political Christian movement were chiefly interested in influencing domestic politics. Since then a growing number of organizations started focusing on and being concerned with international affairs and foreign policy issues. With the end of the Cold War political Christian enthusiasm for international politics exploded and a qualitative and quantitative shift was observable in the attention given to international issues by political Christian actors.<sup>4</sup> A few key events drove this shift.

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<sup>4</sup> Once more a historical perspective is important here. What is being argued is *not* that Christian actors and churches were never interested in international issues prior to the 1980s and 1990s, but that a qualitative and quantitative shift occurred. Indeed historically since the origins of America, national religious interest groups have focused periodically on international relations and foreign affairs (Ribuffo 2001). American Christian organizations have carried out missionary work in developing

First the collapse of Soviet Communism was greeted with great triumphalism among American religious leaders and movements. Religious activists appeared to consider the “West’s ideological victory to be divinely inspired” (Marsden 2008, , p.114). Many political Christians saw the active role of God through the workings of Pope John Paul II, the Solidarity movement in Poland, (once-allied) religiously driven Mujahidin in Afghanistan, and Ronald Reagan’s moral clarity in bringing the “evil Empire” to its knees. Inspired by the end of the Cold War and growing more confident in their power, political Christians, especially conservative evangelical ones, decided to ‘follow God abroad’ and actively pursuing internationalist policies on aid, development, the protection of human rights and military intervention (Kristof 2002).

Second, since the 1990s onwards, processes of globalization also “heightened international awareness and increased international engagement by virtually all national religious interest groups” (Hertzke 2009, , p.314). Driving this growing engagement by American Christian groups abroad was particularly the global expansion of Protestantism internationally and the important shifts in the world’s Christian population whose total numbers in Asia, Africa and Latin America today surpass those in Western countries (Jenkins 2002; Martin 2001; Robbins 2004). Many of these Christians live in conditions of poverty, violence, exploitation, and persecution and, as American believers increasingly hear about and identify with them, they seek ways of providing assistance by influencing American foreign policy. As a result, for example, “the American evangelical movement has become more global in orientation” (Gerson and Wehner 2010, , p.20), its agenda has broadened from focusing exclusively on domestic moral issues to including foreign social concerns such as poverty, religious freedom, the environment, and world health.

Third, the events of 9/11, had a further impact. The religiously charged atmosphere that followed of apocalyptic fights between the forces of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ mobilized Political Christians of all kinds in support or opposition to Bush’s War on Terror (Bacevich and Prodromou 2004). Debates on whether there was a good or bad Islam, good or bad Muslims, and whether America was at war with either gave a further boost to issues of faith in international politics.

These shifts are clearly charted by a flourishing scholarly literature in the past decades tracing the growing influence of Christian actors on American foreign policy and international affairs (Abrams 2001; Haynes 2008). American Christians are heavily mobilizing against what they perceived as international Christian persecution, particularly in the context of the Sudanese civil war (McAlister 2008; Hertzke 2001). They are seeking to advance the cause of religious freedom and human rights, often – and unexpectedly - linking up with secular human rights NGOs (Croft 2007; Hertzke 2004). Christian Zionists are lobbying for sustained U.S. (unconditional) support

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countries, reporting back to parishioners about conditions abroad, since the 19th century. For example Mainline Protestant churches had a pivotal role in pressing for the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (Nurser 2005). Mainline Protestant churches also were central in the anti-Vietnam protests. Likewise conservative Christian activists have long been anti-communist. Their first mobilizations against the Soviet Union goes back to the 1950s. During Reagan years CR actors – encouraged by the state department – were offering ideological and financial support to anti-communist forces in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua (Martin 2003).

towards Israel (Kiracofe 2009; Mead 2006; Mearsheimer and Walt 2007; Davidson 2005; Spector 2009).

Faith-based NGOS have obtained access to huge increases in foreign aid financing to eradicate poverty and tackle HIV/AIDS internationally (Thomas 2004; Clarke 2006; Marsden 2010). Some of the more conservative Christian organizations are seeking to mainstream their domestic concerns on protecting 'family values' within international forums and organizations such as the UN (Buss and Herman 2003; Butler 2006). Others instead have pressured law-makers to curtail American funding for the UN and the World Bank often seen as hubs of liberal secularist elites and norms (Croft 2007; Ruotsila 2008). Conservative Christians have largely supported the War on Terror and the 2003 Iraq invasion, with some organizations also providing moral justification for the wars (Prodromou 2008; Froese and Mencken 2009; Marsden 2008). Politicized Christians are increasingly lobbying for greater action on environmental protection - or what these movements refer to as 'creation care' (Croft 2009; Mead 2006).

All of the above highlights the qualitative and quantitative growing influence of Christian organizations on specific policy issues (support for Israel, campaigning against religious persecution, etc.). Equally relevant are the effects these organizations' lobbying is having on foreign policy institutions as religious actors lobby for their normative concerns to be taken into account in the decision and policy making process. I have argued that their combined efforts contribute to the process institutional desecularization.

Nested within the larger political Christian movement I identify four categories of activists that are directly responsible for desecularizing foreign policy institutions. These 'desecularizing activists', like the broader political Christian movement, encompass a wide range of political and policy perspectives. Some hold more conservative positions, in line with the Christian Right, and others more progressive ones, in line with Christian Left. Some are more middle of the road. Activists come in different organizational shapes and forms. I identify four categories of activist organizations involved in the daily promotion of their religiously preferred foreign policies. These are either headquartered in Washington D.C. or have acquired a substantial lobbying presence inside the Beltway.

- i) faith-based advocacy and lobbying organizations;
- ii) faith-based policy research centres and think tanks;
- iii) church/denominational-based organizations; and
- iv) faith-based organizations (FBOs) and international faith-based non governmental organizations (FNGOs).

*Faith-based advocacy and lobbying organizations* are founded explicitly with the aim of pressuring decision and policy makers in Washington D.C. Their headquarters are therefore often located inside the Beltway. These organizations aim both at informing and educating the public about their issues of concern, while also advocating and lobbying key foreign policy decision-makers and organizations for the implementation of religiously based policies. They also generally hold the legislative, the executive and other institutions accountable for any previous commitment and pledge. Individual activists and members of faith-based advocacy and lobbying organizations do not join for purely spiritual purposes, as they do with churches for example, but for overt political ones.

Examples of activist organizations which fall into this category, going from the more conservative to the more progressive side of the aisle, are: Concerned Women for America (CWA), founded in 1979; Family Research Council (FRC), founded in 1983; Christians United for Israel (CUFI), founded in 2006; Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD), founded in 1981; Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), founded in 1973; Institute for Public Policy and Religion, founded in 1999;<sup>5</sup> The Sojourners, founded in 1971; and The Interfaith Alliance, founded in 1994. Some activist organization last only the space of specific campaigns. An example was the campaign for the promotion of international religious freedom led by Nina Shea which led to the adoption by congress of the International Religious Freedom Act in 1998 (Hertzke 2004).

A growing number of *faith-based policy research centres and think tanks* are springing up in and around D.C. This is a particularly interesting new development in the galaxy of religious interest groups in American politics. These organizations are often difficult to discern from their lobbying and advocacy oriented cousins. What most clearly sets them apart though is a focus on producing research and organizing conferences/events as a central means of influencing the public and foreign policy debate on religion, rather than carrying out direct lobbying activities. Given their interest in influencing policy their headquarters are often found inside the Beltway. Some of the major players are: the middle of the road Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), founded in 2000; the more conservative Ethics and Public Policy Center (EPPC) established in 1976;<sup>6</sup> and the conservative Beverly LaHaye Institute.

*Church and denominational-based organizations* are the public and institutional face of wider churches and denominations comprising millions of faithful. These organizations have long histories and are tightly linked to their churches and congregations which are spread across the country. Denominational-based organizations are staffed largely by church officials, rather than lay people, as is the case with most of the above organizations. Their main focus is on theological and ecclesiastical matters, rather than public policy and as such these are rarely headquartered in Washington D.C. Most of them however, have set up shop in the capital. Originally they did so to monitor government activity and regulations and whether these interfered with the religious life of their faithful. However with time, they increasingly became vocal participants in political debates while also broadening their engagement on foreign policy issues (Hertzke 2009; Amstutz 2001). Today they run extensive operations with foreign policy specialists and lobbyists.

More conservative protestant denominational organizations are, for example, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Assemblies of God, the Lutheran Missouri Synod, and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). The U.S. Catholic Conference

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<sup>5</sup> The institute is not strictly an American Christian organization, but rather an international inter-religious one. Yet its mission dovetails with that of many other political Christian activists, particularly conservative ones.

<sup>6</sup> The EPPC is an inter-religious organization bringing together protestant, Catholic and Jewish scholars and straddles between secular and religious research. Its agenda is to stand firmly for both 'conservative principles' as well as so-called 'Judeo-Christian' ones. It aims to "reinforce the bond between the Judeo-Christian moral tradition and the public debate over domestic and foreign policy issues" and to deal "openly and explicitly with religious and moral issues in addressing contemporary issues" (<http://www.eppc.org/about/>)

of Bishops is more middle of the way. The National Council of Churches (NCC) brings together mainly mainline denominations and is more tilted towards liberal and progressive positions.

*Faith-based organizations (FBOs) and international faith-based non-governmental organizations (FNGOs)* are the fourth category in which religious activism is organized. Like denominational-based organizations, FBOs and FNGOs are not primarily concerned with lobbying and influencing the direction of American foreign policy. Their main objective is to cater to the social and religious needs of individuals by promoting certain religiously based values and/or providing services (such as health, education, food, shelter, protection) to the most vulnerable. Since most FBOs and FNGOs were not founded with the stated aim of informing and influencing domestic and foreign policy, their headquarters are rarely in Washington D.C. They generally have longer histories which predate the 1970s. However, in recent decades they have increasingly stepped up their Washington presence and lobbying efforts and have become major religious activists.

FNGOs are mainly concerned with providing international assistance to the poor, the sick and those involved in conflict situations. The boundaries though between their humanitarian work, their missionary impulse and evangelizing aims which all drive their activities is oftentimes very blurred. Important FNGOs on the more conservative and evangelical side are World Vision, NAE's World Relief, Food for the Hungry, Samaritan Purse and Operation Blessing. Catholic Relief Services and Lutheran World Relief are more middle of the way, and Bread for the World and Church World Service are considered more progressive FNGOs. Three characteristics distinguish FNGOs from their secular NGO counterparts. First, the articles of incorporation or mission statement of these organizations make an overt statement of religious faith as the motivating force behind their work. Second, they hire all or most of their staff based on a creed or faith statement. Third, they are generally associated with some religious hierarchy or theological tradition (Natsios 2001, p. 191).

Rather than providing services or delivering aid as FNGOs do, FBOs are geared more towards the promotion of particular religious norms and values. The protection of persecuted Christians worldwide and the promotion of religious freedom is a key concern for example of many FBOs. Older organizations working to raise awareness, assist and stem Christian persecution worldwide such as Voice of the Martyrs (founded in 1967) and Open Doors (1955) have in the past decades opened branches in Washington D.C. Newer ones have also sprung up directly in and around the District of Columbia such as Persecution Project Foundation (1997) and Christian Freedom International (1998). Other FBOs such as Evangelism Explosion International and Campus Crusade for Christ International are mainly concerned with evangelization and proselytization. Crusade for Christ's Christian Embassy in Washington D.C., carries out evangelization activities among the highest levels of the White House, Pentagon, foreign embassies and Capitol Hill since the 1970s. The scope is to assist individuals at the highest levels of the executive and legislative to "integrate their faith and their work". Evangelism Explosion has an International Center for Christian Statesmanship that conducts spiritual outreach and evangelizes among D.C. insiders.

### *Desecularizing Elites*

Religious revivalism affects American foreign policy not only through grass-roots domestic Christian desecularizing activists. A second typology of desecularizing agents is religiously concerned secular elites in leadership positions within academia, think tanks, policy and politics. I call these ‘desecularizing elites’. These elites are not embedded within the structures of global religious resurgence, as ‘desecularizing activists’ are. They are instead responding to the macro social shifts that are increasing the salience of religious actors and discourses both domestically and internationally. Unlike Christian activists who are chiefly motivated by normative concerns and principled beliefs, desecularizing elites act mainly instrumentally according to either a domestic or an international logic.

Desecularizing elites who act according to domestic logics of instrumentality seek to mainstream religion within foreign policy in response to pressures by domestic Christian activists and movements. They respond to these pressures with the goal of gaining political capital and votes. This is not to say that these religiously conscious elites act only instrumentally, indeed they may be sympathetic to the desecularizing activists’ agenda (especially if they are personally very religious themselves). Yet they would unlikely be initiating religious sensitive institutional and policy changes from the top unless there were some sort of pressures from below. It is principally political leaders such as presidents and members of both houses who I have in mind here as ‘desecularizing elites’ driven by domestic political concerns.

Indeed presidents and members of congress have been greatly influenced over the years by the electoral power of the growing political Christian movement. For example, by the 2000s the Christian Right became a staple of American national politics from its distant origins in the 1970s when Jerry Falwell founded the Moral Majority. The Moral Majority had an important role in electing Ronald Reagan and he did much to paper the movement. Throughout the past decades, Christian Right figureheads regularly appeared on national television and consulted at the highest levels of the Republican Party. Their political ascendancy was staggering during the presidency of G.W. Bush (Milbank 2001; Wilcox and Larson 2006; Hudson 2008). Their electoral muscle was evident in the 2004 election when a whopping 78% of the white evangelical vote went to G.W. Bush. During the 2008 presidential campaign, evangelicals such as Rick Warren hosted at his Saddleback Church in Orange County California what at the time was trumpeted as the first televised encounter between presidential candidates Barack Obama and John McCain. Recently conservative Christians have become a central constituency in the emerging Tea Party movement (Brookings 2010).<sup>7</sup>

While the Republican Party courted voraciously the conservative Christian vote, the Democratic Party had no comparable strategy for courting faith-based voters. Even though the first evangelical born-again president ever to be elected was Jimmy Carter (and not G.W. Bush), the Democratic party for most of the past decades has explicitly

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<sup>7</sup> . E.J. Dionne of the Brookings Institute argues that there is not much split between the Tea Party and the religious right. He finds for example that key Tea Party favorites rank highly also among conservative evangelicals. For example Mike Huckabee has a 73% favorable approval rating among white tea partiers and 74% favorable approvals among white evangelicals. Sarah Palin which has even higher standing among tea partiers had 64% favorable ratings among white evangelicals

shun any talk of religion in the public sphere and made little or no efforts to reach out and engage with religious voters (Wallis 2006). But changes are afoot.

The staggering religious support for Bush's re-election in 2004 was a wake-up call for Democrats (Olson 2008). Democratic candidates are increasingly drawing upon two constituencies in a sustained effort to close the so-called "God Gap" between them and Christian voters (Smidt et al. 2010; Sullivan 2008). The first are a new wave of politically active evangelicals who are moving away from the divisive moral crusades of their more conservative forefathers and appear less uncritically anchored to the Republican party (Moser 2008; Halloran 2008; Olson 2008). The second are moderate and progressive Christian actors who are themselves becoming more vocal in proposing an alternative model of religious activism to the Christian Right's (Wallis 2008; Edgar 2006).

Democrats' efforts to reach out to people of faith were most visible during the past 2008 presidential election. During the campaign both Hilary Clinton and Barak Obama employed campaign advisors for religious affairs and faith-based outreach (Obama's faith-based advisor now works very closely with him in the White House). Furthermore both candidates at the time participated, along with John Edwards, in an unprecedented – at least for Democrats – televised Sojourners debate on 'Faith, Values, and Poverty' on CNN. As such while Republicans were already for some decades quite attuned to the demands of Political Christian voters, Democrats have now joined them.

The second category of 'desecularizing elites' acts instead mainly according to international logics of instrumentality, rather than domestic ones. This other category of religious conscious elites perceive the post-Cold War world, especially the post-9/11 one, as a world where religious actors, identities and ideologies have become more salient to America's security and national interest. The perception that religion 'mattered' more to American interests is partly reflected in the wide resonance that Huntington's thesis of civilizational clashes has gained among foreign affairs experts since it was first published in 1993. Still today, every new subscriber in 2010 and 2011 to *Foreign Affairs*, the leading international affairs journal among American policy makers, received an updated and complimentary copy of *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate* (Hoge 2010).

In practice, the awareness of religion's growing influence in international affairs among foreign policy elites is tied to three broad issues, all linked to processes of global religious resurgence. First, political Islam has become a chief American security concern over the past two decades. Secondly, 'Christian' and 'Muslim' identities have become more politicized in the wake of 9/11 and the American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thirdly, given the global reach of American military, diplomatic and aid operations, these are increasingly affected by the social and political decisions made by local religious actors on the ground. As a result such elites believe that U.S. foreign policy ignores this new cultural dimension to international politics at its own peril. It should take religion more seriously in its military campaigns, diplomatic activities and/or foreign aid programs. Hence they mobilize at the highest levels of power for American foreign policy institutions to take religious issues more seriously.

For example, pundits like Edward Luttwak were among the first to lament that American statecraft suffered from an “enlightenment prejudice” which lead diplomats and scholars to see the world through secular lenses and discount the role of religion in international affairs (Luttwak 1994, p.9). Given the blindness of the state department to international religious dynamics, Luttwak suggested that “religion attachés” should be put in place in “diplomatic missions in those countries where religion has a particular salience, to monitor religious movements and maintain contact with religious leaders” (Luttwak 1994, p.16). This article was part of a wider edited book *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (Johnston and Sampson 1994) whose origins laid in a conference organized by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a leading international affairs think-tank in Washington D.C.. The publication was endorsed with a forward from former president Jimmy Carter.

Thomas Farr, professor at Georgetown University and former diplomat, has explicitly argued from the pages of *Foreign Affairs*, that in the current ‘age of faith’ American diplomacy needs to undergo a processes of desecularization if it is to keep Americans safe (Farr 2008). A recently edited volume *God and Global Order: The Power of Religion in American Foreign Policy* makes a similar case when in the introduction spells out that: “This book argues that American foreign policy must more fully acknowledge the power of religious faith in international relations if it is to be credible and effective in the turbulent century ahead” (Chaplin and Joustra 2010, p.2). The book includes articles by prominent IR scholars on religion such as Thomas Farr, Daniel Philpott, Scott Thomas and Katherine Marshall.

Former Secretary of State under President Clinton Madeleine Albright has also joined the discussion and proposed similar solutions. In her recent book *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs* she argues that “to anticipate events rather than merely respond to them, American diplomats will need to ...think more expansively about the role of religion in foreign policy and about their own need for expertise.” (Albright and Woodward 2006, , p.99). The link between the resurgence of religion and American foreign policies unmistakably drawn by Mrs. Albright in the following passage of her book: “the resurgence of religious feeling will continue to influence world events. American policy-makers cannot afford to ignore this” (Albright and Woodward 2006, , p.117). These are just some of the prominent individual voices in the current debate on the impact of external religious forces on American foreign policy. It is surely not an exhaustive list. In particular, the next section will explore how these discussions are interconnected with wider debates taking place among elites within foreign policy oriented universities, think tanks and bureaucracies.

Overall this section outlined the two main typologies of agentic forces at play in the process of American foreign policy institutional desecularization. The first typology are ‘desecularizing activists’. These can be divided into four categories: faith-based advocacy and lobbying organizations; faith-based policy research centres and think tanks; church/denominational-based organizations; and faith-based organizations (FBOs) and international faith-based non-governmental organizations (FNGOs). These desecularize institutions ‘from below’ by pressuring (through mechanisms of coercion and/or persuasion) policy and decision makers to adopt their religiously inspired foreign policy norms. These activists are part of the wider Political Christian

movement in American politics anchored to broader social processes of religious resurgence.

The second typology of agent affecting institutional changes is ‘desecularizing elites’. These elites are not directly embedded within the emerging structure of politicized religion, they are however affected by these social changes and are responding to them. There are two categories of desecularizing elites responding either to domestic or external religious forces. Domestically oriented desecularizing elites have realized that religion matters more ‘at home’ and seek to score political points by responding to the demands of Christian Right or Christian Left activists. Internationally oriented desecularizing elites believe that religion matters more ‘out there’ and conclude that an overly secularized foreign policy misses the growing religious dimension of international politics at America’s own peril. If the particular academic, policy-maker or politician is himself/herself individually religious, he/she is more likely to be in tune either with the demands of domestic religious activists or more aware of the power of religion in international affairs. At the end, even if driven by different interests, both domestic and international desecularizing elites end up pushing for the inclusion of religious factors in foreign policy making. Given the leadership positions these individuals occupy within the foreign policy establishment, they are involved in a process of desecularization ‘from above’.

### **The Desecularization of American Foreign Policy<sup>8</sup>**

“In the early 1980s, I became a professor at Georgetown University. My specialty was foreign policy, about which such icons as Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan, and Dean Acheson theorized almost exclusively in secular terms [...]. I cannot remember any leading American diplomat (even born-again Christian Jimmy Carter) speaking in depth about the role of religion in shaping the world [ ...]. 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”. (Albright and Woodward 2006, , pp. 10-11)

In this passage Madeleine Albright vividly describes the overwhelmingly secular mind-set of America’s foreign policy establishment and institutions during the 1980s. Clearly, at the time, religion was something that American foreign policy just ‘did not do’. Yet, by 2011 this is not the case any longer. American foreign policy today increasingly ‘does’ religion. Firstly, religion is not anymore taboo in foreign policy circles - as the title of Mrs. Albright’s book clearly suggests. Secondly, religion is increasingly institutionalized within: a) prominent universities and think tanks which feed, indirectly or directly, into the process of American foreign policy formation; and b) in government bureaucracies such as the Department of State, USAID, the Department of Defence and the White House.

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<sup>8</sup> Note: empirical work still needs to be done to trace the causal processes leading to the outcomes this section describes.

This section charts the discursive, institutional and policy changes which all of the above institutions have undergone, to greater or lesser extent, to accommodate domestic and external rising religious forces. For example, most of these institutions have produced a growing number of reports, documents and speeches on matters concerning religion. Most of them have also created new departments, since the 1990s onwards, focusing on particular religious issues of concern. Lastly, all of these institutional changes have led to a wide-range of religious sensitive policy outcomes.

### *Universities*

Universities with strong links to the Washington foreign policy establishment such as Harvard and Georgetown are giving more and more space to religion and international affairs in recent years. New centres and courses are being created to explore and promote better understanding about the intersections between religion and international politics.

Georgetown University, a central training ground for American diplomats, recently inaugurated The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs in 2006.<sup>9</sup> Among the main projects of the center feature the following: Religious Pluralism in World Affairs; Globalization, Religions, and the Secular; Religion and US Foreign Policy; Religious Freedom Project; Religion and Global Development; and Religion, Conflict, and Peace. The center hosts renowned sociologists and political scientist working on religion like Thomas Banchoff and José Casanova. Thomas Farr, a key figure in debates over international religious freedom whose articles have appeared on the pages of *Foreign Affairs* (Farr 2008) and *Foreign Policy* (Farr 2010), is the director of the centre. Professor Farr also co-authored with Dennis Hoover, from the Institute for Global Engagement, a report addressed to the Obama administration on *The Future of U.S. International Religious Freedom Policy* (Farr and Hoover 2009).

The Belfer Center, the international affairs centre of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, launched in 2007 The Initiative on Religion in International Affairs. The objective of the Initiative is to “explore the role of religion in global affairs and to deepen understanding of religion as it affects the behavior of states and other political actors and the development of foreign policy”.<sup>10</sup> The project has courses, seminars, executive training sessions, and research projects, aimed at policymakers, scholars, and students interested in exploring the importance of religion in the study and practice of international affairs and foreign policy.

### *Think Tanks*

The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), America’s leading think tank on international affairs, is probably the research and policy institute that has done the most to raise the issue of religion among American policy makers. First of all it has done so by setting the policy debate in D.C. through the pages of its highly influential publication *Foreign Affairs*. It was here that Huntington’s controversial article “The Clash of Civilizations?” first appeared in 1993 (Huntington, 1993). Since then the debate is still alive and well (Hoge 2010).

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<sup>9</sup> <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/>

<sup>10</sup> [http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/project/57/religion\\_in\\_international\\_affairs.html](http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/project/57/religion_in_international_affairs.html)

More recently, CFR launched a Religion and Foreign Policy Initiative in 2006 with the objective to provide “a forum to deepen the understanding of issues at the nexus of religion and U.S. foreign policy”.<sup>11</sup> The initiative conducts a series of programs such as the Religion and Foreign Policy Meeting Series which explores the impact of religious doctrines on foreign policy. The program was hosted by key religious figures (and desecularizing activists) such as Richard Land, of the Southern Baptist Convention, Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church, and Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, archbishop of Washington.

The center carried out a series of roundtables on Evangelicals and Foreign Policy engaging evangelical leaders on issues such as: trade and development, religious freedom and human rights. CFR also hosts a Study Group on Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Contemporary World, lead by Walter Russell Mead, a Senior Fellow at the Council and well known author on American foreign policy, and cosponsored with the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. The aim of the study group is to examine the role of religion in American and international life and develop an analytical framework and long-term research agenda.

A Religious Advisory Committee provides guidance for all aspects of the initiative. The committee includes key foreign policy elites figures who regularly participate in debates about religion and international affairs, like: Madeleine Albright, former Secretary of State, Father Bryan Hehir, professor at Harvard University’s Hauser Center; Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life; and Chris Seiple, president of the Institute for Global Engagement. The initiative’s portal also regularly reports on issues concerning political Islam and broader developments in the Middle East. One of the key contributors is Elliott Abrams, Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies, which among other things is also: the author the influential edited volume *The Influence of Faith: Religion and American Foreign Policy* (2001); former president of the Ethics & Public Policy Center (1996-2001); a former member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (1999-2001); and one of the highest ranking advisors on ‘democracy strategy’ and ‘the Middle East’ during the G.W. Bush’s two term presidency.

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is also at the forefront of research on religion and American foreign policy. As outlined earlier the ground breaking book *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* published in 1994 was an outgrowth from a CSIS conference. In 2007 it produced a 92-page long report entitled *Mixed Blessings: U.S. Government Engagement with Religion in Conflict-Prone Settings*. The study is still today the most thorough investigation into U.S. government approaches to religion abroad, providing concrete policy guidelines on how to use better government resources and energies to account for the power of religion in international politics (CSIS 2007).

The Brookings Institute has a well-established research program that carries out extensive publications and conferences on religion in American domestic politics. Over the years it has increasingly produced research on and contributed to debates about religion and international affairs. In 2003 it organized a major event on religion and American foreign policy, which then it turned into the edited volume *Liberty and*

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.cfr.org/about/outreach/religioninitiative/mission.html>

*Power: A Dialogue on Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy in an Unjust World* (Hehir 2004). Most recently Brookings released a report on *The Role of Religious Leaders and Religious Communities in Diplomacy* which explores the role of religious leaders as diplomats in mitigating political conflicts based on religious differences (Grand and Badani 2010).

The conservative think tank Hudson Institute, hosts since 2007 the Centre for Religious Freedom. The Centre produces research and advocates for the integration of religious freedom as a central American foreign policy concern - both for principled reasons and as a matter of national security for the U.S..<sup>12</sup> The Centre is directed by Nina Shea, one of the leading advocates (and desecularizing activists) behind the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) passed by congress in 1998 which made the promotion of religious freedom a central component of American foreign policy (Hertzke 2004). Before moving to the Hudson Institute the Centre was housed in Freedom House during the 1990s.

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs released the report *Engaging Religious Communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy* in 2010. The report was widely covered by major media outlets and directly addressed the newly incoming Obama administration. The document was the result of a task force of thirty-two ‘experts and stakeholders’ (i.e. desecularizing activists and elites) – former government officials, religious leaders, heads of international organizations, and scholars – with the scope of contributing to the debate over how the U.S. should engage with religion on an international level (Appleby, Cizik, and Wright 2010). The task force was co-chaired by Scott Appleby, director of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies University of Notre Dame and key author of the monumental *The Fundamentalism Project*, and Richard Cizik, president of the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good and former Vice President for Governmental Affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). “Despite a world abuzz with religious fervor” - the report bitterly concludes – “the U.S. government has been slow to respond effectively to situations where religion plays a global role” (Appleby, Cizik, and Wright 2010, , p.21).

Another secular research institution increasingly engaging with religion is The Pew Center. The Pew Center is not strictly a think tank, as it is mainly a survey and polling research institution, however it is still involved in substantial research which feeds into processes of policy making.<sup>13</sup> Since it launched The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life in 2001 it conducts a growing amount of research on religion. The Pew Forum on Religion seeks to promote a deeper understanding of issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs.<sup>14</sup> Its two main programs are on Religion and American Society and Religion and World Affairs.

### *The State Department*

Today for example the State Department has an Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) whose mission is to promote “religious freedom as a core objective of U.S. foreign policy”.<sup>15</sup> The office is headed by an Ambassador-at-Large for

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<sup>12</sup> <http://crf.hudson.org/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://pewresearch.org/about/projects/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://pewforum.org/Pew-Forum/About-the-Pew-Forum.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> See: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/#>

International Religious Freedom and its role is to monitor religious persecution and discrimination worldwide, recommend and implement policies, and develop programs to promote religious freedom. The office produces an Annual Report on International Religious Freedom describing the status of religious freedom in each of 195 countries throughout the world. The office works closely with an independent United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Both the IRF and the USCIRF were established through the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) passed by Congress and signed by President Clinton in 1998.

State is also increasingly engaged in outreach towards Muslims throughout the years. More recently the Obama administration inaugurated the post of Special Representative to Muslim Communities. Farah Pandith was appointed as the first Special Representative to Muslim Communities in June 2009. Her office is responsible for engaging with Muslims around the world on a people-to-people and organizational level. Mrs. Pandith reports directly to the Secretary of State.<sup>16</sup>

#### *USAID and Foreign Aid*

Some of the most interesting changes have occurred within USAID and American foreign aid assistance more broadly. The Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (CFBCI) was established at USAID by executive order in 2002. Its objective is to create a level playing field for faith-based organizations (FBOs) and international faith-based NGOs (FNGOs) to compete for USAID funding and programs.<sup>17</sup> The Center is designed to increase the access of FBOs and FNGOs to U.S. government funding sources. Major new programs for fighting HIV/AIDS worldwide, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), was launched in 2003. PEPFAR has given a further opportunity to FBOs and FNGOs to access government resources for their aid work.

The institutional and policy changes in foreign Aid which were introduced by the Bush administration and continued and expanded by the Obama one, were built on the Charitable Choice initiative which in 1996 during the Clinton presidency had already removed restrictions on funding for FBOs for domestic activities. The expansion of aid delivery to include religious NGOs has been rather controversial. In the case of USAID issues of church and state separation are at stake as aid delivery is at times mixed up with the proselytizing agenda of many of these FBOs {Marsden, 2010 #313; Newman, 2010 #325}. PEPFAR has been criticized for allowing FBOs to build their programs around religious messages of abstinence and faithfulness only, leaving aside condom use as a safe means to prevent further infections.

In parallel to providing direct funding to American based religious NGOs, USAID is increasingly conducting research on the role of religion on development activities. In particular it has produced reports exploring how religious dynamics impact its operations and how local religious actors can be better incorporated into development and conflict-prevention programs (USAID 2009a, 2009b).

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.state.gov/s/srmc/index.htm>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/global\\_partnerships/fbci/about.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_partnerships/fbci/about.html)

### *The Department of Defence*

The Pentagon has increasingly sought to come to grips with how religion factors into military planning and operations. With the military's direct involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, service men are now provided with training on religious and cultural issues particularly pertaining to Islam. The roles and duties of the military chaplaincy have been expanded in recent years. Chaplains are traditionally responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of the forces. A 2004 Joint Doctrine has required that chaplains start advising commanders on local religious issues and act as liaison with religious actors on the field (CSIS 2007). Their responsibilities have since then been further expanded by an updated 2009 'JP 1-05, Religious Affairs in Joint Operations' directive (Marsden 2010).

While efforts at understanding the religious 'other' are stepped up requiring chaplains to play a growing role on the ground, number of reports suggest that conservative Christian churches and organizations are increasingly encouraging military chaplains and personnel to proselytize within the military and overseas (Grim 2009). Military men are encouraged by conservative Evangelical organizations to seek converts and hand out bibles translated into local languages in the Middle Eastern operational environments the military is involved in. These practices are raising concerns over the entanglement of religious and secular duties of some military personnel (Sharlet 2009; Glain 2010; Marsden 2010).

### *The White House and the Presidency*

The Presidency is equally undergoing a process of desecularization when it comes to foreign policy. Since the late 1990s, religion started to feature more prominently as a security concern and policy issue within National Security Strategies (NSSs). Language on protecting and advancing religious freedoms abroad appeared for the first time in Clinton's 1999 NSS. A CSIS report has calculated that President Bush's 2002 NSS refers to religious issues - including religious freedom, religiously driven conflict, and efforts to eradicate terrorism in the 'Muslim world' - four times. His 2006 NSS includes nineteen references to those same issues (CSIS 2007). President Obama directly officially addressed an entire religious community in his 2009 Cairo speech to the 'Muslim world'. In the speech Obama also argued that religious freedom was a key policy priority for the United States in the Middle East (Obama 2009). David Domke and Kevin Coe calculate that the public use of religious references and language by presidents has increased exponentially from the Reagan years onwards (Domke and Coe 2007).

Institutional changes have accompanied the discursive shifts noticeable in security documents and presidential speeches. G.W. Bush created an Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives within the White House in 2001. The Office was initially designed to assist faith-based organizations to bid for federal funding to deliver social programmes at home and abroad. Barack Obama has continued Bush's faith-based initiatives with a reconstituted and expanded Office of Faith-Based and Neighbourhood Partnerships. The upgraded office does not only provide grant opportunities for FBOs, but has new policy generating capacities through an appointed 25-member religious advisory council (Salmon 2009). Overall the office, which mainly focuses on domestic matters, is engaging increasingly on foreign policy issues.

### *Levels of Desecularization*

An evident desecularizing trend is occurring. Discourses on and about religion are ever more present among the American foreign policy establishment, in national security strategies, in policy reports, and presidential addresses. Institutions are changing too. New centres and departments have opened in universities, think tanks and governmental bureaucracies. As a result of these shifts, new (often controversial) policies are implemented that somewhat seem to blur secular and religious lines. How does one measure desecularization though? What counts as a completely secular bureaucracy, compared to one which is mildly desecularized or one which is fully desecularized? I would argue that, to the extent that discourses on religion have increased and new departments and policies engaging with religious issues and actors have appeared, then U.S. foreign policy is considered to be ‘desecularizing’. The extent to which U.S. foreign policy has eventually undergone desecularization is a matter of degree (which still needs to be assessed in my research). For now I propose a first tentative distinction among possible levels of desecularization:

- *Fully secular*: A fully secular institution is one that in no shape or form engages with religion on religion’s own terms. Its discourses do not mention or relate to religion, religious actors or any religious dimension of international politics. What is more, religion is explicitly shunned. Discourses, departments and policies are not designed to be sensitive to religious issues. If an engagement is taking place with a religious actor, this is carried out purely on secular grounds.
- *Minimal desecularization*: When minimal desecularization occurs there is a change in discourse. Religion is being recognized as an independent force in international politics, either for good or evil. There is a recognition that religion ‘matters’, that it may positively or negatively affect American interests, and hence may be worth paying attention to. But no institutional changes or policy responses have yet taken place to do so organically.
- *Mild desecularization*: Mild desecularization is present when organizations and bureaucracies have moved from engaging with religion only at a discursive level to a certain degree of institutional change. At this point foreign policy institutions have newly formed departments or centres, they produce reports, have training programs and prepare policy guidelines focusing on issues of religion. Overall though religious issues are still very marginal, particularly because of bureaucratic inertia and secular biases.
- *Medium desecularization*: When there is a medium level of desecularization, institutions start to have policies directly aimed at supporting and/or engaging with agents because of – and not in spite of - their public religious dimension. This support and/or engagement occurs through financial or diplomatic means. At this level one expects there to be a certain degree of interaction between American foreign policy institutions and religious agents. These interactions may illicit wider debates and concerns over issues of state and church separation.
- *Strong desecularization*: At a strong desecularization level, the institution increasingly privileges the religious over the secular dimensions of politics. Discourses are framed nearly exclusively in religious terms and international affairs are mostly seen through a religious lens. Politics and faith become

increasingly intertwined. Policy is formulated and justified mainly on religious grounds rather than secular ones.

- *Full desecularization*: Is when there is near to none separation between church and state, faith and politics, theology and policy.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper seeks to make three contributions: an empirical one on the state of religion in American foreign policy; a theoretical one regarding the study of foreign policy; and a larger one on the role of religion in international relations theory and practice.

“The turn towards religion has been a discernible subtext in American statecraft since the end of the Cold War”, noted Elizabeth Prodromou and Andrew Bachevich in 2004 (p.44). What Prodromou and Bachevich are describing highlights what I have come to call the process of institutional desecularization of American foreign policy. That is, key non-governmental institutions with important international affairs programs such as universities and think tanks and governmental bureaucracies such as State, USAID, the Pentagon and the White House have all produced research, created departments, and developed policies on religion across the past two decades.

Most of the research discussing these trends has taken an overtly normative stance so far. On the one hand, are critics who argue that the inclusion of religion in American foreign policy has gone too far. They point out how the Christian activists which are driving the process of desecularization are causing a gradual erosion of first amendment principles, an infringement of the establishment clause and a perilous blurring of the lines between church and state (Jacobi 2010; Glain 2010; Newman 2010). On the other hand are those who lament that the U.S. is failing to fully comprehend the newly religious dimension of international politics. American foreign policy has a problem, these observers argue, it is too secular and just doesn't get religion. More should be done to integrate religion in foreign policymaking in order to bridge the so-called 'God-gap' between secular domestic institutions and a religious international reality (CSIS 2007; Farr 2008; Appleby, Cizik, and Wright 2010).

This paper has taken a step back from these debates. Rather than arguing from a normative or policy perspective whether the process of desecularization is desirable or not, I sought to stand apart from prevailing discussions and ask how that very same order came about by examining larger processes of change. I have argued that to fully grasp why institutional desecularization is occurring in the first place, these shifts should be contextualized within larger structural processes of change underway identified with the 'desecularization of the world'. I then argued that the causal link between processes of global religious resurgence at the macro-level and the institutional changes occurring at the meso-level are the lobbying activities carried out by two typologies of 'desecularizing agents'. On the one hand Christian activists who seek to mainstream their religious normative preferences from below. On the other hand religiously conscious elites are pushing from above for the inclusion of religious issues within foreign policy making. These agents relate to the macro social structure of global religious resurgence in different ways: the former are embedded within it, while the latter are responding to it. The normative preferences and interests these

agents hold about the role and importance of religion in international politics have led to discursive, institutional and policy changes in American foreign policy.

The paper also adds empirical bullets to a growing arsenal of FPA and IR theories which seek to reconcile structural theories and agent-centric approaches to explain state behavior (Mabee 2007; Carlsnaes 2008, 1992; Houghton 2007; Hook 2008; Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009). The paper has adopted a multilevel framework that takes into account how religious and secular agents, who are either embedded within or responding to changes in social structures, can explain foreign policy changes. It provides a dynamic account of states foreign policies relying on the concrete causal actions taken by agents within the enabling and constraining possibilities given to them by shifting social structures.

Finally it contributes to broader debates about the role of religion in international relations. So far most of the attention to religion in IR has involved broad theoretical debates on whether or not the discipline should reinvent itself if in order to properly study religion both theoretically and empirically. These debates have reproduced longstanding habits within the discipline which tend to privilege interparadigmatic warfare rather than puzzle-driven empirical research of real-world problems (Wight 1996; Sil and Katzenstein 2010). As such, while scholars have called for (at times radical) paradigm shifts within IR (Hatzopoulos and Petitto 2003; Kubalkova 2003; Thomas 2005; Fox and Sandler 2006; Hanson 2006), Eva Bellin argues that truly challenging questions about *when* and *how* does religion matters often go unexplored (Bellin 2008, pp. 341-342).

By looking at the conditions under which American foreign policy desecularization is taking place, and how particular activist and elite agents are involved in counter-secularizing activities highlights the real world social dynamics and political dimensions behind abstract concepts of religious resurgence. By drawing on existing FPA theory, in particular from Carlsnaes work, it also indirectly refutes arguments requiring new laborious theoretical constructs to explain and understand the causal role of religion in international relations.

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