

INDIA – MALAYSIA

Bilateral Relations in the 21st Century

Editors

Dr. I. Parvin Banu

Dr. R. Sivaramakrishnan



Associate Editors

Mr. P. Keerthivasan

Mrs. S. Shajitha Banu



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RELIGION AND GLOBAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

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Abstract---In an era of geopolitical uncertainty and shifting power dynamics, religion has re-emerged as a vital force shaping international relations and strategic alliances. This paper explores how religious ideologies, institutions, and interfaith diplomacy influence strategic and security cooperation globally. While religion is often associated with cultural identity or moral guidance, its impact on security strategies, counterterrorism collaborations, and peace negotiations demonstrates its relevance in global partnerships. The paper highlights both the constructive and disruptive roles religion plays in global strategic frameworks, calling for a nuanced understanding of its integration into contemporary security paradigms.

Keywords---Religion-Strategic Partnerships-Security Cooperation-Religious Diplomacy.

1. Introduction

Global strategic partnerships are increasingly shaped not only by economic or military interests but also by cultural and religious factors. Religion, long sidelined in secular international relations theory, now commands attention as a soft power asset, a conflict mediator, and sometimes a source of strategic tension. As nations navigate evolving threats such as religious extremism, ideological polarization, and civil unrest, cooperation grounded in shared religious values or religious diplomacy becomes more significant for long-term strategic and security objectives.

2. Review of Literature

Haynes (2014) argues that religion is now central to international affairs, influencing diplomacy, national identity, and foreign policy. He emphasizes that religion must be understood as a transnational force capable of mobilizing people and shaping strategic decisions, particularly in regions like the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. **Snyder**

(2011) explains how religious ideologies—both radical and moderate—affect global security agendas, often requiring states to balance national interests with religious sensitivities. **Appleby (2000)** explores how religious actors, such as the Catholic Church and Muslim clerics, act as mediators in conflict zones where secular diplomacy has failed. Religious organizations are seen as trusted intermediaries capable of building peace through values like forgiveness, reconciliation, and moral responsibility. **Philpott (2007)** reveals how moral authority can be a form of soft power in international negotiations. Religious legitimacy, in such cases, supplements conventional state diplomacy. **Mandaville and Silvestri (2015)** warn that using religion purely for political or strategic ends may erode credibility and intensify sectarian divisions.

3. Religion as a Factor in Strategic Alliances

Religion often forms a cultural bridge that facilitates trust and alignment between nations. Faith-based commonalities contribute to strategic alliances in the following ways:

Shared Religious Identity: The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) unites Muslim-majority nations in coordinated efforts on security, political, and humanitarian fronts. Their collaboration is often underpinned by religious solidarity, especially in response to regional conflicts or crises affecting the Muslim world.

Value-Based Diplomacy: Strategic partnerships such as those between the Vatican and democratic nations focus on human rights, global peace, and ethical foreign policy. These alignments often transcend traditional power politics.

India's Multifaith Diplomacy: India's strategic outreach to countries like Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Iran demonstrates how religion and pluralism are used as diplomatic assets in forging robust security and economic ties.

4. Religion in Counterterrorism and Global Security

One of the most direct intersections of religion and security cooperation lies in combating religiously motivated terrorism. Multilateral cooperation frequently involves:

- **Interfaith Dialogue for Deradicalization:** Countries like Indonesia, Morocco, and Egypt partner with international bodies to promote moderate religious education as a counterbalance to extremist ideologies.
- **Intelligence Sharing:** India and the U.S., along with several EU countries, collaborate on intelligence mechanisms to monitor transnational jihadist movements, often coordinating through religious scholars and community leaders.

- **Religious Leaders as Security Actors:** In regions like the Sahel and parts of South Asia, religious leaders work alongside government agencies to discourage youth recruitment by terrorist groups.

5. Religion in Conflict Resolution and Peace building

Religious institutions and leaders have played crucial roles in strategic peace initiatives:

The Vatican's Mediation Role: The Holy See has historically engaged in behind-the-scenes diplomacy to resolve conflicts in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa.

- **Faith-Based Peace Missions:** Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist organizations have mediated ceasefires and humanitarian access in conflict zones like South Sudan, Myanmar, and Nigeria.

- **Strategic Partnerships in Humanitarian Intervention:** Religious NGOs often operate in tandem with national militaries or coalitions during crises, such as in Syria or Yemen, where faith-based legitimacy enables access and influence.

6. Risks of Religious Instrumentalization

Despite its positive potential, religion can also complicate strategic cooperation:

Religious Nationalism: Ideologies such as Hindutva (India), political Islam (Turkey), and Orthodox nationalism (Russia) may cause friction with secular or pluralistic allies.

Sectarian Rivalries: Sunni-Shia tensions continue to shape strategic competition in the Middle East, often drawing in external powers and weakening collective security initiatives.

Politicization of Religion: Using religion as a political tool can erode credibility and exacerbate internal divisions, undermining international partnerships and regional cohesion.

7. Challenges and Criticisms

Despite its benefits, integrating religion into strategic partnerships presents risks:

- **Instrumentalization of Religion:** Using religion for political or strategic gains can backfire, leading to increased polarization and backlash.

- **Religious Extremism:** Misinterpretation of religious texts can fuel extremism, undermining the very partnerships religion seeks to support.

- **Secular Resistance:** In secular or pluralistic societies, overt religious diplomacy may face skepticism or resistance.

8. Conclusion

Religion is no longer peripheral to strategic and security cooperation; it is integral. From counterterrorism and peacekeeping to alliance-building and diplomacy, religious identities and institutions are shaping how nations collaborate for mutual security. Going forward, policymakers must recognize religion not merely as a cultural variable, but as a strategic factor — capable of both uniting and dividing global actors. Strategic partnerships that respect religious diversity, promote interfaith engagement, and counter religious extremism are better equipped to foster peace, security, and global cooperation in the 21st century.

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