

Faith-based diplomacy and its relationship to government and private organization...

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



The confluence of religion and politics is almost always controversial - the varying conflicts that arise from people of different religions (and even different sects of the same religion) can make tackling issues of public policy or business extremely difficult. With that said, there may be some merit to pursuing faith through diplomacy in a governmental context. Given the connection that faith can provide between countries, faith-based diplomacy can be a useful tool of foreign policy. These issues and more will be explored in the context of Madeleine Albright's essay " Faith and Diplomacy."

The biggest challenge that stems from any political interaction, whether by government or private organization, is attempting to understand the other side of the argument. However, one aspect of culture that is universal, if not by type than by presence, is religion - " Religion is a powerful force, but its impact depends entirely on what it inspires people to do" (p. 24). Even in the case of different religions, it is possible for people to have similar goals - living in peace, interacting freely with one another, etc. Even with faith-based diplomacy in dealing with a government or entity of a different religion, there is still the appeal to reason that can be used to find real progress.

Faith has been shown to have a tremendously positive effect on the relations of two distinct peoples. In one instance, Pope John Paul II was tasked to reconcile Poland with the rest of the West. Using his beliefs and his faith, he managed to appeal to the Polish people through basic principles that were centric to all faiths and walks of life, regardless of religious orientation. John Paul II told people to have no fear, and to not cooperate with the totalitarian

regime that ruled Poland at the time. With this religious influence, the Polish proletariat " recognized in each other once again the qualities that made them proud to be Polish - faith in God and a willingness to run risks for freedom" (p. 25). Given the influence of religion on the minds of the people of Poland, it is possible to enact peace through the careful application of faith.

The government can often find tremendous value in using religion in politics - finding common ground is important, as previously mentioned, and " faith-based diplomacy can be a useful tool of foreign policy" (p. 31). When interacting with other countries, especially ones with a large religious following or impact in their politics, it often makes sense to interact on that basis. However, as Albright argues, it should not " replace traditional diplomacy" (p. 31). There should still be secular, reasoned, logical reasons for doing the things that governments do, independent of religion. This is especially true when the nations being governed do not subscribe to a single (or even majority) religion; if faith-based diplomacy were taken to its furthest extreme, that would betray those being governed who do not share the faith.

The greatest positive to using religion and faith in diplomacy is the potential for the aforementioned common ground to unite differing nations: " Religion at its best can reinforce the core values necessary for people from different cultures to live in some degree of harmony; we should make the most of that possibility" (p. 31). However, there is also the tremendous risk of faith-based diplomacy bringing nations to war against each other, as the worst case scenarios of faith-based diplomacy can often lead to violent conflict. The

Lord's Resistance Army seeks "to overthrow the Ugandan government and replace it," based on religious conflict (p. 27). By bringing these differing views of Christianity into the discussion of politics, these two groups are now in conflict. Then again, this is one of the risks in dealing with clashing views of the same faith - "It is often simpler to deal with people of completely different faiths than with those who share a religion but disagree about how it should be interpreted" (p. 31). With that in mind, the risk is far too great to allow faith-based diplomacy a large role in governmental policy.

Private organizations also have the ability to simply ignore other companies or organizations that do not share their same religious beliefs. This is in tune with the ideals of the Institute for Global Engagement - 'The institute's mantra is, 'Know your faith at its deepest and richest best, and enough about your neighbor's faith to respect it.'" (p. 30). Without having to tie itself to the political whims of national governments, private organizations may have the independence and clout to operate as representative of their own interests. Furthermore, private organizations are not often militarized, and do not have the resources of a national war machine to potentially use to settle disputes. With that said, the stakes are often lower for faith-based private organizations, and violent conflict would either be avoided or be much easier to facilitate.

Religion has both positive and negative consequences to diplomacy and foreign relations, depending on its application. First, it must be recognized that "people are willing to die - and kill - for their faith" (p. 26). This is one of the many extremes that faith-based diplomacy can resort to, if used in a

dramatic enough way. In the case of Poland, it led to a successful revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall; however, it can also lead to other religious-based violence upon innocent lives. Secondly, " religion at its best teaches forgiveness and reconciliation" (p. 26). If these values can be emphasized while using faith-based diplomacy, it can be useful to create beneficial foreign policy.

In conclusion, faith-based diplomacy can work in both governments and private organizations to an extent, but there are some risks to this process. In the case of governments, the potential is too great for religious conflicts to arise between militarized nations for it to be an absolute policy, though finding common ground through religion is helpful. In the end, that common ground is what makes faith-based diplomacy such an effective tool of foreign policy both for private organizations and government. By having another way to appeal to a foreign nation's sensibilities, this type of diplomacy can have tremendous positive effect on foreign relations.

Works Cited

Albright, Madeleine. " Faith and Diplomacy." in Emerging. Barrios, Barclay, ed. Bedford/St.

Martins, 2010. Print.