FRAMING I[F]R: INTERNATIONAL & INTERFAITH RELATIONS[*]
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Let me begin with a caveat. There is much to say about interfaith relations around the world. The great pluralism of religions in various regions of the world and the richness of each tradition—and their relationships with other faiths—are intriguing and important. Equally important and fascinating are the relationships of the different countries of the world. I do not wish to minimize either. However, for the purposes of this paper, the examples upon which I draw, and the illustrations I use are heavily weighted toward the Middle East and Islam, because of my own background, experience, and study focus. This slant should not be understood to give one region or one faith primacy. Even so, this focus perhaps fits well with current global attention to discussions and debates about political Islam.

When I was applying to doctoral programs, I was living in Cairo, Egypt, where, among other things, I was completing an M.A. in Middle East Studies at the American University in Cairo. In preparing my doctoral program applications, I had requested a letter of recommendation from a particular mentor. He agreed, and shortly thereafter, showed me a draft of the letter. In it, as I recall, he wrote in support of my application to study international religions, and then offered his opinion on my competence to pursue such studies. The letter was humbling, and at the same time, it made me think—a lot. The idea of studying international religions was indeed interesting to me for, while living in Egypt, I was in daily contact with Islam and Muslims. The only problem was that I was actually applying to study international *relations*. International Relations… international religions: that slight variance in the value of the vowel, and the voiced or unvoiced consonant sound, was, in hindsight, an important moment for me. My dual interests in interfaith relations and comparative and international politics were nicely confused, in a way that would lead to the development of my concentrations and foci, and eventually my research interests and doctoral dissertation topic.

The main assertion of this paper is that perspectives—indeed framing—comprise essential aspects of the links between international relations and interfaith relations. Let me start with a recent case study. Just one month ago, I attended the National Muslim-Christian Initiative, on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The Initiative is a three-year-old dialogue forum of Christian denominations and several US-based Muslim organizations including the Islamic Society of North America and the Islamic Circle of

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North America. This dialogue table, while young, is not new, as the US churches have been in relationship with Muslims here for quite some time through the National Council of Churches. Since September 11, 2001, however, convening such a table has taken on a higher sense of priority and some challenges.

During the meeting last month, we had the opportunity to engage our Muslim partners on the June 4 speech President Obama made in Cairo, entitled, "Remarks on a New Beginning." That speech was highly promoted in advance, and watched by millions around the world, in anticipation of Obama's articulation of a new approach to US engagement with the Muslim world. Before the venue was announced, there was much speculation and discussion about where Obama might make this promised speech— Istanbul, Indonesia, Israel-Palestine were all suggested for reasonable reasons: perhaps Istanbul, given its Ottoman history and the closeness of US-Turkish relations today; maybe Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, itself the home of almost as many Muslims as the number in the entire Arab world, and Obama's part-time childhood home; possibly Israel-Palestine, the spiritual home of the three Abrahamic faiths, and the center of the enduring Arab-Israeli conflict. All were good reasons to consider, but in the end, Cairo was chosen, for Egypt's history, its size and influence on Arab and Muslim politics, the long and strong relationship with the United States, and the opportunity to speak to more sensitive issues of human rights and democracy that have formed an ideological pillar of US foreign policy along with other policy pillars, such as oil and military relationships.

Obama began his speech with an acknowledgement, stating:

We meet at a time of great tension between the United States and Muslims around the world—tension rooted in historical forces that go beyond any current policy debate. The relationship between Islam and the West includes centuries of coexistence and cooperation, but also conflict and religious wars…I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition.[1]

The speech was impressive. It lasted almost an hour and was a combination of fine rhetoric, a clear articulation of policy directions, and even an engaging homiletic flavor. Obama's examination of history and his presentation of the US and Islam as potentially overlapping cultures and principles, were welcomed by many around the world. Immediate response in Cairo and throughout parts of the Middle East was positive, but there was clear yearning for the implementation of actions that would reflect the grand rhetoric and hopeful directions—something along the lines of "we have heard good things before; now we want to see action."

At the National Muslim-Christian Initiative dialogue table, when asked about response to the Cairo speech, our American Muslim colleagues responded by saying two things: first, none of what Obama said was new. Most, if not all, of those in the room— and so many in the global audience—knew and were sympathetic to much of what President Obama identified—that the history of Islam and the West is mixed in terms of positive and negative interaction; that Islam and America are not mutually exclusive in terms of culture, government, and borders; and that US policy history is littered, contradictory, and in need of change. All of these ideas, and others, were worthy of

affirmation, although in this sense, the speech did not break any new ground. The references to sacred texts Obama made were also appropriate, but ones that people engaged in fostering good relations among faith communities would cite frequently. So, according to our American Muslim friends, the speech was nothing new. On the other hand, they also told us that, while the content was perfectly consistent with the ideas of those who promote dialogue and a fairer and more just US foreign policy, the speech was a watershed—remarkable simply because the president of the United States took the responsibility to compose such a sensitive speech, demonstrating commitment to better relations and better policy. The speech synthesized an element of personal history, drawing on Obama's own heritage, rooted in both Christianity and Islam, made scriptural references from all of the Abrahamic traditions, and spoke about the difficulties of the status quo in the Arab-Israeli conflict. That a sitting president would say what he did, in such a widely anticipated—and advertised—speech, was the significance of Obama's Cairo speech for our American Muslim dialogue partners. It was for our Muslim partners, gratifying to hear such a change coming from the White House, after a less than positive direction in recent years.

Obama's speech illustrates how perceptions and framing demonstrate the link between interfaith and international relations. Obama's Cairo speech was billed one way, but actually addressed something else. The Obama administration itself spoke of the then-upcoming speech as one that would address US relations with the Islamic world. This basic dichotomy itself is problematic. Even though Obama noted the six million and growing Muslim population of the United States, and that Christians—who trace their roots back to the first century—inhabit the Middle East, the conceptual framework positioned the US on one side, and Islam on another. This paradigm involves a nation and its relationships and policy on the one hand, and a major religion on the other. Characterized in this way, it is reminiscent of the ideas of Bernard Lewis, the prominent historian of Islam and the Ottoman Empire who advised President Bush (the son) on Middle East policy immediately following September 11, and of Samuel Huntington, the Harvard professor who borrowed Lewis's phrase "clash of civilizations" to describe the status and future of international relations in his seminal—and highly controversial—1993 article[2] in the prominent journal *Foreign Affairs*, which he later developed into a book of the same name. In employing the phrase "clash of civilizations" in 1990, Lewis referred in his article "The Roots of Muslim Rage" to the clash between Christianity and Islam.[3] Even so, in an unintentional way, Obama may have reinforced the notion that the world can be divided along such incongruous lines—nations and religions. Even more dangerous would be a reinforcement of the idea of global religious divisions with the US, or the West, on the Christian "side" of that divide, and the Middle East on the "Muslim" side.

The speech's formulation of the US relationship with the Muslim world is also flawed as the essential policy aspects of the speech dealt predominantly with US policy in the Middle East, especially Israel-Palestine. The Middle East, of course, is a homeland to Muslims, as well as Jews and Christians, but only about one-fifth to one-fourth of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims live in the Arab world. The speech was in this regard a disappointment to Indonesian Muslims, for example, as it did not address their context.

Without analyzing other aspects of the speech, though, it is worth spending just a little more time on the matter of framing and perceptions. Framed as a speech about the

US and the Muslim world, it actually was heard by many as a speech about US policy in the Middle East. In this regard, Obama's words were widely applauded, especially the identification of the "situation of Palestinian people" as "intolerable," and Obama's call for the cessation of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Even so, of the seven issues Obama raised—violent extremism, the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict, nuclear weapons, democracy, religious freedom, women's rights, and economic development— the directions Obama outlined were more about US foreign policy direction than interfaith or intercultural relations, and the main focus was the Arab Middle East and Iran. This fact simply highlights a basic confusion—and convolution—of international relations and international religions. In the end, the implementation of the ideas is what much of the world's audience awaits. Indeed, that the Nobel Committee cited as one of its reasons for conferring this year's Peace Prize on the president his efforts to ease tensions with the Muslim world can be seen as *anticipatory* of Obama's efforts to develop better interreligious relations, as well as his efforts to create a better international climate in which the US can play a helpful role.

When students begin their study of international relations theory, one of the first words and concepts they learn is realism. Realism presumes anarchy in the international system, a Hobbesian world in which life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[4] This idea as applied to the nation-state requires certain approaches to ensure survival. Unlike a nation that has a system of law and a way to enforce it, the international system has no central authority, and each state actor is out to protect its self-interest. The state must protect itself from external threats, but not every actor is equal in its power. Power is the currency of international relations. An imbalance of power creates a situation of suspicion and alliances and efforts to create a certain balance, one in which the weaker states will find some protection against perceived threats through alliances. State power, for realists, includes such elements as military capabilities and control of resources, enabling it to coerce other states to comply. The more power one state has, the more authority it gleans in the realist system of IR. Structural realism, or neo-realism, focuses on this idea of a balance of power, the equilibrium of the system. Structural realism focuses at a basic level on the way states interact with each other, rather than their motivations to pursue a certain agenda, which might include domestic considerations, moral arguments, or principles of idealism. Realism tends to look at the world through the lens of power, and specifically military power. To put this colloquially, "If you only have a hammer, everything looks like a nail."

A second school in international relations is complex interdependence. Complex interdependence is associated closely with classical liberalism, which holds that markets function for the benefit of all; international economic exchange is in the global interest; and that foreign policy is conducted with common benefit as the main goal. Emerging from Enlightenment ideas that humanity is basically good, the natural state of relationships tends toward harmony, not conflict, and that knowledge will lead to peace, these ideas are applied to the level of state actors in the paradigm of complex interdependence. Complex interdependence asserts that international relations are conducted on many levels, not limited to the state-to-state channels that exist between governments, but expand into the areas of commerce, citizen exchanges, and others. There is no hierarchy of issues in international relations, and the use of military force is most often *not* the appropriate approach to solving international problems. Complex

interdependence, therefore, asserts that there are various kinds of power, both hard and soft. Instead of a hammer, the community of nations requires many tools to engage.

The United Church of Christ is deeply involved in ecumenical and interfaith relations, and is an outspoken advocate against the sole reliance on military power as a way to view international issues. In its 1985 proclamation of the UCC as a "just peace church," the General Synod called the denomination to "work to end the institution of war" and to identify situations of injustice in the world in order to advocate on behalf of those who suffer those injustices. The Just Peace pronouncement calls upon the church to demonstrate "extraordinary witness as well as ordinary political involvement to break the power of the structural evils that prevent a Just Peace."[5] This proclamation clearly seeks to encourage the church to look at global issues through multiple lenses, but through the basic framework of justice. The church builds international relationships, contributing to a broader network of complex interdependence. The UCC advocates for the nations of the world to engage seriously with each other through a model of complex interdependence. It recognizes and laments, however, that nations—and unfortunately the US is often one of them—take an apparent realist approach, asserting power through military muscle, often justifying that by citing national security. The UCC recognizes another reality in which, in the words of Zachary Lockman, "The boundaries that once seemed to separate 'us' from 'them,' 'here' from 'there,' have blurred; the distinct pigeonholes into which one could imagine one was neatly sorting things have proven porous or crumbled away altogether…. [Even so,] the language of imperial power through which too many politicians and military planners and pundits and think-tank analysis in the United States generally make sense of the world remains the common idiom."[6]

Those of us in educational institutions and the church find ourselves more prone to regard international relations though a lens of complex interdependence because seminaries, colleges, universities and the Church are among those institutions that contribute to the network of relationships that expand international relations beyond government diplomatic and military engagement. The church and educational institutions are more empowered to understand the world in its vast complexities because our relationships go beyond simple power calculations.

The idea of complex interdependence extends to interfaith relations. Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel, in a 1966 speech stated, "The religions of the world are no more self-sufficient, no more independent, and no more isolated than individuals or nations…. No religion is an island. We are all involved with one another."[7] Without exploring the theological aspects of interfaith relations, the UCC's approach to global mission is through Global Ministries of the UCC and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Throughout the world, our churches enjoy relationships with churches, church-related organizations and interfaith organizations, all of which are described using the somewhat vague term, "partners." Currently, the UCC enjoys relationships with more than 200 partners worldwide. While many of these are churches and Christian organizations, not all are, and those that are, do not always serve Christians exclusively. A few examples will illustrate this. One of Global Ministries' most popular programs, one that tends to attract a high level of involvement by individual members of the church and local congregations, is the Child Sponsorship program though which people here can support the educational needs and expenses of children in sponsorship partner schools.

One example is in Jerusalem, where Global Ministries' partner is Rawdat al-Zuhur, a primary school established in 1952 by a Palestinian Christian to provide a home and education for refugee girls. Today, the school continues to flourish, offering education for girls and boys in the heart of East Jerusalem. The school's students have reflected the demographics of the Palestinian community, with a small percentage of Christian pupils. For the last few years, the entire student body has been Muslim, and the school is in high demand. Another child sponsorship center in Southern Asia in fact offers training for Buddhist monks. Beyond the Child Sponsorship program, Global Ministries has partnerships with organizations such as the Turkish Health and Education Foundation which, since the mid-1990s, has operated the historic American Board schools in Turkey, schools that date back to the 19th century and the early Congregational mission, which established educational and medical institutions in the Middle East and around the world. The Foundation's board of directors is comprised of graduates of the American Board schools. All are Turks, and all are Muslim. The schools the foundation operates are attended by Muslim, Jewish, and Christian Turks.

In the Middle East, a partner is the Arab Group for Muslim-Christian Dialogue, an organization of Muslims and Christians, imams and Christian clergy, journalists, professors, intellectuals, and others within in the opinion-forming cadre throughout the Middle East. The members of the Arab Group for Dialogue discuss together issues of human rights, religious freedom, democratization, citizenship—issues that can become highly political quite quickly, and ones that are often avoided in discussions in the Middle East. These leaders discuss the difficult topics openly and, more importantly, share the discussions and conclusions of the group with a wider audience through the various outlets they have, including their own religious communities (Sunni, Shi'ite, Druze, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant), newspaper and television. They do in fact have impact, and their recommendations have weight. The organization is part of civil society, not connected to any Middle Eastern government institutionally, although the caliber of the members lends the group prominence. As an organization that focuses on interreligious dialogue, it is a natural partner for the UCC and Disciples, each of which has affirmed the importance of interfaith relations, and for seeking peace and justice in the world—a commitment shared by the Arab Group for Muslim-Christian dialogue.

In November 2004, the Common Global Ministries Board of Directors adopted a resolution calling for the elimination of the Separation Barrier that Israel had begun to erect—a barrier that encroaches into the occupied West Bank, in some places far beyond the internationally-recognized Green Line that divides Israel from the Occupied Palestinian West Bank. The resolution, which was subsequently adopted by the UCC's General Synod[8] and the Disciples' General Assembly[9] in the summer of 2005, brought attention to the hardships the Palestinian community faces as a result of the construction of the barrier. It said that the wall should not be build in the West Bank in violation of international law, and that, because it prevents Israeli and Palestinian groups actively seeking peaceful resolution of the conflict access to each other, it denies the possibility for reconciliation between the two communities, and therefore should be removed. When adopted by the Global Ministries Board, we shared the resolution with partners around the world, including with the Arab Group for Muslim-Christian Dialogue. The chair of the Arab Group, Mr. Muhammad al-Sammak, is a prominent Lebanese journalist, who has a weekly column in a major Lebanese paper, one that was at the time syndicated for

publishing throughout the Arab press each Wednesday. For one of his columns, Mr. Sammak, a Sunni Muslim, decided to translate the resolution and share it with his readership in Lebanon, Egypt, and beyond. His intention was not simply to disseminate a position of a mission board of a US church that he rather liked. He concluded his column by asking his reading audience why Arab Muslims tend to leave dialogue initiatives to official government institutions like the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic States. He proposed that Muslims in the Middle East should find more ways to engage in dialogue and relationships with American churches like ours.[10] In another such column after a similar sharing of positions on the Middle East, he wrote, "I wish to be courageous enough to say what the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church in the USA have said…. To my information, no Islamic institution has dared to say it…. Those who said it are American Christians who dared to speak up." Mr. Sammak concluded his article by writing, "Never turn your back on the American Church. President Bush's Administration does not represent the American Church."[11]

This last quote, warning readers not to associate the president of the United States with the American church is both accurate and insightful. It is accurate for Mr. Sammak to inform his readers that the president of the US does not represent the US churches. It is insightful to us because it indicates that such an association might be a natural assumption among Middle Eastern Muslims. Since most of the people of the Middle East have not had extensive interaction with the people and/or churches of the US, they might associate the president's policies with the views of the US churches and thus of American Christians. While there is great diversity of perspective when it comes to foreign policy among US Christians, associating the policies of the president or the administration with the positions of US Christians—or of Christianity—is errant. Through Mr. Sammak's own deep engagement with church leaders from the US, and time spent in the US, he knows that the US churches have, by and large, taken positions on US foreign policy that are much more nuanced; positions that consider local dynamics and of the impact of those policies on the people in the places where the policy becomes manifest; positions that are often critical or directly at odds with US policy.

The conflation of church and state may not only be a problem for Middle Eastern populations as they look at the US and Europe, but for US populations regarding the Middle East. It is errant to perceive political regimes there as spokespeople for Islam or, in the case of Israel, for Judaism. In fact, only two governments of the Middle East explicitly self-identify with a religious tradition—the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Israel, which describes itself as a Jewish state. The impact of Islam on the constitutions and laws of many Middle Eastern and other countries varies, and the non-Muslim communities of those nations often raise the issue. The impact of religious parties and movements in the Middle East—outlawed or not—is also significant, but to assume a religious character of a regime, though, is problematic.

The idea of a civilizational conflict was not novel in the early years of the 21st century, but it clearly took on new prominence in the debate. As I mentioned earlier, Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington were important figures in the framing of religious culture as a central aspect in international relations. Lewis, in his article "The Roots of Muslim Rage" which appeared in *The Atlantic* in September 1990, wrote,

> [W]e are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and
> policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of

civilizations—the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both…. We must strive to achieve a better appreciation of other religious and political cultures, through the study of their history, their literature, and their achievements. At the same time, we may hope that they will try to achieve a better understanding of ours, and especially that they will understand and respect, even if they do not choose to adopt for themselves, our Western perception of the *proper* relationship between religion and politics.[12] [E*mphasis added.]*

In the second half of the last century, the Cold War was the predominant reality in international relations, a circumstance lasting decades that justified much military spending and the perpetuation of a hammer-and-nails view of the world, not just by the two superpowers, but by nations within regions that were theaters for the acting out of the Cold War drama, including but not limited to the Middle East, Central and South America, and Asia. Lewis's article was published after the falling of the Berlin Wall by mere months. Lewis's conclusion seems more to describe than to provoke, yet weighs in at such an early moment in the post-Cold War era on the next epic conflict: that with Islam.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, many observers and analysts suggested that the US would seek a new enemy to ensure the continuation of its role as superpower on the world stage. Some suggested that Islam would replace the Soviet Union as the main antagonist for the United States. Lewis's article in 1990 began to make the case, a case that arguably did not take hold in terms of perceptible policy with any strength for another decade. The article did, though, serve as a prelude to Samuel Huntington's article in *Foreign Affairs*, 3 years later, entitled, "The Clash of Civilizations?" In that Summer 1993 issue, Huntington sparked a global debate that continues to this day. He begins by stating,

the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.[13]

Huntington's theory was more specific when he wrote that, "This centuries-old military interaction between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline. It could become more virulent." He called this divide between Islam and the West the "fault line."[14] Without going into the deep debates that have taken place both in the academic and popular journals in this country about the general thesis and interpretations of Huntington's article, or exploring the contentious analysis of the thesis in the Middle East and globally, it is important to say that there are important nuggets of the article that seem to have been prescient. The following excerpt will help illustrate:

The conflict between the West and the Confucian-Islamic states focuses largely, although not exclusively, on nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, ballistic missiles and other sophisticated means for delivering them, and the guidance, intelligence and other electronic capabilities for achieving that goal. The West promotes nonproliferation as a universal norm and nonproliferation treaties and

inspections as means of realizing that norm. It also threatens a variety of sanctions against those who promote the spread of sophisticated weapons and proposes some benefits for those who do not. The attention of the West focuses, naturally on nations that are actually or potentially hostile to the West. The non-Western nations, on the other hand, assert their right to acquire and to deploy whatever weapons they think necessary for their security.[15]

This prediction resembles the basic issue the US is currently facing in the standoff with Iran—nuclear capabilities. What Huntington points to, though, in this last excerpt is the very core issue of framing the discussion. In the current diplomatic situation with Iran, is the issue "the West and a Confucian-Islamic state"? Both Iran and the US are party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Even so, there are references to an "Islamic bomb" in various media outlets. The framing of the issue is crucial to an understanding of the current row. I would argue that both Iran and the US have attempted to frame the issue in ways that are unhelpful for their own constiuencies, in order to portray the conflict as part of the meta-conflict that has grander issues at stake including, in some analysis, the eschaton. It is also interesting to note that the previous president of Iran, President Khatemi, proposed a dialogue of civilizations—to counter the idea of a clash. Unfortunately, his idea never gained sufficient traction.

In some ways, Huntington got it right in predicting the nature of conflicts to come, but he attempted to frame the so-called "fault lines" in ways that distract from basic issues, going far beyond the realpolitik of realism or inticate relationsips of complex interdependence and into a less clear area of analysis.

The case of Israel's separation barrier can further illustrate how framing international relations in religious terms can contribute to an oversimplification, or masking, of issues. The Bush administration's rhetoric and practice following September 11 has been well documented elsewhere, but suffice it to say that its approach to Islam was not perceived as very positive. Despite President Bush's attempts to make clear that the ensuing two-front war waged in Afghanistan and in Iraq did not target Islam, policies and practices resulted in poor treatment of Muslims in the US and abroad. From the slip of the use of the word "crusade" in one of his early speeches, the detention of staggering numbers of American Muslims in US jails, held without charge but suspected of some crime or another, to the targeting of two countries that are predominantly inhabited by Muslims, to the images of incarceration at Guantanamo and torture at Abu Gharaib, perceptions were being formed constantly, with evidence to support them. All of these examples came in the grand framework of a "war on terror," perceived readily as a "war on Islam."

A close US ally, the Israeli government took advantage of the opportunity to frame its conflict with the Palestinians in religious terms, stating that it was literally on the front line of the larger global civilizational war against militant Islam. Israel's prime minister Ariel Sharon spoke of Israel's "war on terror," referring to military operations against Yasir Arafat in 2002,[16] and implying Israel's location in a hostile neighborhood of Muslim-dominated countries, threatened locally by HAMAS and regionally by fundamental Islamist forces bent on Israel's destruction. Ignoring political issues and Palestinian grievances over land and resources, the need for the construction of the separation barrier was sometimes framed as an effort to demarcate the boundaries of this great civilizational war, with the implication that Israel is on the "right" side of history

and of this epic battle. Israeli opposition leader Tzipi Livni reiterated this theme recently when she stated, "Israel's war on terror is not just its business, we are representing the entire free world. Backing Israel's war on terror constitute[s] supporting …the very ideals they (in the free world) believe in, against those who are not willing to live in peace with their surroundings and want to impose extremist Islamic ideology."[17]

To what extent do religion and interfaith relations actually play a role in individual response to international relations and foreign policy? Let me turn to a discussion of the overlap of identities and the quest to live "in peace with one's surroundings." The importance of distinguishing between state and national identity in international relations is brought to bear by Telhami and Barnett (2002). In their edited volume, *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, Anthony Smith makes this point:

> The [state] refers exclusively to public institutions, differentiated from and autonomous of, other social institutions and exercising a monopoly of coercion and extraction with a given territory. The nation, on the other hand, signifies a cultural and political bond, uniting in a single political community all who share a historic culture and homeland. This is not to deny some overlap between the two concepts, given their common reference to a historic territory and (in democratic states) their appeal to the sovereignty of the people. But, while modern states must legitimate themselves in national and popular terms as states of particular nations, their content and focus are quite different.[18]

This clarification has particular relevance to the issue of the intersection of international and interfaith relations. The significance of the need to make this clarification is especially helpful in the post-Cold War era. In the words of Telhami and Barnett,

> At one time, the need to distinguish between state and national identity would have struck international relations scholars as unnecessary. The working assumption during much of the Cold War was that the state represented a rather homogenous community within its borders that could be referred to as a nation. But the end of the Cold War and the unleashing of ethnic and identity-based civil wars led international relations scholars to revise their assumptions and to recognize that the state and the nation are not coterminous in much of the world. In fact, the lack of overlap between state and national identity can generate an inherently unstable and precarious situation, one that results in political, economic, and symbolic exercises by the state in order to shift subnational loyalties to the symbols of the state.[19]

While I would argue that ethnic- and religious-based identity, as opposed to national identity, is not necessarily new in the post-Cold War context, it has in fact attracted the attention of the general public in more prominent ways. We might consider, for example, more public and media attention to the Kurds of Iraq and Turkey; the differences between Shi`ite and Sunni Muslims in terms of political identity in Iraq, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia; and the case of the so-called Arab Israelis—Palestinians who are citizens of the State of Israel, Muslims and Christians who comprise just under 25% of the Israeli popultation—citizens of the state, but ethnically and religiously identified with the Muslim and Christian Palestinian community of the West Bank, Gaza, and the refugee community of the diaspora. The interests of such communities are generally not reflected in the policies of the state domestically, and are often in direct conflict with the foreign policies of the state. For example, the Israeli Arabs, who often have family living in the

West Bank or beyond, and who are Palestinian themselves, naturally oppose occupation of the Palestinian territories, and oppose aggressive Israeli military action against the Palestinian populations there. Their visible opposition to such manifest policies results in the questioning of their allegience to the state of which they are citizens. Such suspicion has led to recent calls by at least one Israeli political party, Yisrael Beiteinu, to strip Arab Israelis of their Israeli citizenship and to expel them to the West Bank.

Such a distinction can be—an often is—made in discussing religious identity and state. In the US, especially after September 11, Muslim-Americans have been accused of other loyalties. "Go back to where you came from!" was a phrase often reported by people who were born and raised in the United States, but who were identified by their dress as Muslims. The discussion about candidate Obama's religion is further evidence to the question of identity and suspicion. As Faisal Abdul Rauf, the Imam of al-Farah Mosque in New York City, writes in his book, *What's Right With Islam Is What's Right With America*,

> Since September 11, Islam, a religion I love and that comprises my essential identity as a human being, has become broadly perceived in the United States a national security threat, while America, a land whose values I cherish, has aroused much antagonism and anguish in much of the Islamic world.... I am both a Muslim and an American citizen, as proud of the important and fundamental principles that American stands for as I am proud of the important and fundamental principles for which Islam stands. Both America and the Muslim world have nourished me in important ways, yet I'm pained by what they have done to each other.[20]

There is obvious overlap between one identity and another, but these identities are not resolved easily when they don't combine as dominant. Racial differences and dress contribute to extenal perceptions and suspicions, and internal personal conflict becomes stronger when the surrounding community questions such apparent contradictions. The issue for American Muslims, perhaps most prominentaly in the past decade, has been how to assert proudly both their Muslim identity and their American identity coterminously, without coming under social, or worse, legal suspicion.

The impact such a conflation of identity has on the implementation of foreign policy may not be obvious. Muhammad Abdur-Rashid, who serves in the US armed forces as the most senior Muslim chaplain, sought a religious opinion on the permissibility of American Muslims in the US military, of whom there are more than 10,000, to serve in battle oerations in Afghanistan or Iraq. Chaplain Abdur-Rashid inferred that the goals of such an operation would be based on these paraphrased justifications: "retaliation against those 'who are thought to have participated' in planning and financing the suicide operations on September 11; eliminating the elements that use Afghanistan and elsewhere as safe haven; [and] restoring the veneration and respect to the U.S. as a sole superpower in the world."[21] The question itself is revealing, especially when posed by a high-ranking Muslim cleric. The response, in the form of a *fatwa*, or religious opinion, was provided by five Muslim clergy, lawyers and judges from Egypt, in one common opinion which states, in part:

> The question presents a very complicated issue and a highly sensitive situation for our Muslim brothers and sisters serving in the American army as well as other armies that face similar situations.

All Muslims ought to be united against all those who terrorize the innocents, and those who permit the killing of non-combatants without a justifiable reason. Islam has declared the spilling of blood and the destruction of property as absolute prohibitions until the Day of Judgement.

We find it necessary to apprehend the true perpetrators of the [Sept. 11] crimes, as well as those who aid and abet them through incitement, financing, or other support. On the other hand, the source of the uneasiness that American Muslim military men and women may have in fighting other Muslims, is because it's often difficult—if not impossible—to differentiate between the real perpetrators who are being pursued, and the innocents who have committed no crime at all. [In a] situation where a Muslim is a citizen of a state and a member of a regular army... he has no choice but to follow orders, otherwise his allegiance and loyalty to his country could be in doubt.

To sum up, it's acceptable—God willing—for the Muslim American military personnel to partake in the fighting in the upcoming battles.... Keeping in mind to have the proper intention as explained earlier, so no doubts would be cast about their loyalty to their country, or to prevent harm to befall them... This is in accordance with the Islamic jurisprudence rules which state that necessities dictate exceptions, as well as the rule that says one may endure a small harm to avoid a much greater harm.[22]

This *fatwa* sums up many aspects of the problems of religion and national policies, including the complexity of reconciling overlapping identities, the difficulty American Muslims face in US society, and the suspicion, and even harrassment, that they experience as a result of steroetypes. Such harassment as the large numbers of Muslims arrested and detained with no charges, and the images of Guantanamo and Abu Gharaib forms impressions of—and enmity toward—the US throughout the world.

Much of what I have discussed so far has identified the negative intersection of religion and politics. The term "interfaith relations" generally carries a more positive connotation, however. Before I conclude, let me turn to a recent a positive example of interfaith and international relations. One of the most significant overtures to emerge in Muslim-Christian relations in the past several years is the document called *A Common Word Between Us and You*,[23] a letter adressed to Christian leaders worldwide of all denominations and ecclesial families, from more than 200 Muslims from around the world. The letter begins by stating that 55% of the world's population is made up of Muslims and Christians, and that for there to be true peace in the world, there should be peace between the people of these two faith communities. The letter carries within it a clear invitation to the Christian world to renew efforts to build peaceful relations together, when it concludes by stating,

As Muslims, and in obedience to the Holy Qur'an, we ask Christians to come together with us on the common essentials of our two religions..." And that "this common ground be the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us." "If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace….Our common future is at stake….Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual good will.[24]

Two Muslim members of the Arab Group for Muslim-Christian Dialogue, mentioned earlier, were among the original 138 signatories, Mr. Mohammad Sammak and Shaikh Hani Fahs, both of whom are Lebanese Muslims, Sunni and Shi`ite leaders respectively. Each of them shared their insights which are particularly helpful for us. Mr. Sammak pointed out the following as part of the rationale for the need for the letter at this particular time. From his perspective,

1. The gap between the Islamic world and the rest of the world is widening. This is dangerous, not only for Muslims, but also for the peace of the world, particularly as Muslims reside in almost every part of the world.
2. The image of Islam is negative and distorted. Islamophobia is increasing, in large part due to the role of international media.
3. Poor relations are exacerbated by the fact that Islam is both misunderstood and misinterpreted. Actions toward Muslims are based on misconceptions, and reactions by Muslims are based on incorrect interpretations.[25]

Mr. Sammak described the purpose of the letter as having the following motivations:

1. To demonstrate the values of Islam, particularly love, not violence; moderation, not extremism; and trust and confidence in other faiths, not opposition or clash.
2. To correct the perception of Islam in the world by breaking the link between Islam and its political use; demonstrating Islamic values that are consistent with similar Christian values; extending a hand of dialogue and cooperation; and working toward creating a new world based on civilizational complementarity, and not a clash of civilizations.
3. To direct the message of the letter to two audiences: the Christian community worldwide, and the Muslim community itself, to put forth an interpretation of scripture that prescribes engagement and interaction with the religious other.[26]

Shaikh Fahs, in perhaps more poetic language, also has communicated to us something of the purpose of *A Common Word*—"We in the Muslim world want to prepare friends for you," meaning the Christian world. Shaikh Fahs, in his discussion of the letter and its intent, noted two further significant ideas:

1. It was not the intent of the Muslim leaders to create an endless exchange of documents and statements. Rather, the real intended purpose is to create new and positive interaction among our communities, and to encourage those groups already in dialogue to take it further.
2. For the specific case of the US, Shaikh Fahs stated very clearly to our church leadership that we should not underestimate what impact a positive response from the US churches would have for the Muslim community in Lebanon and the Middle East.[27]

This latter comment undoubtedly has to do with the perception in the Middle East that the so-called "Christian" West, and specifically the US, is waging war against Islam, and is carrying that out in Iraq and Afghanistan, Palestine through its support of Israel, and elsewhere. Positive reception and response to *A Common Word* by the US churches, combined with some of our critical positions on the war and impact of occupation in both Iraq and the Palestinian territories, would help dispel the possible perception that all Christians in the US view the world in the same way. As for Shaikh Fahs's first point, that the result of the letter not be limited to statements and documents, that is where we

all must heed the call of the letter as expressed by the Shaikh, and the implicit invitation to prepare friends for each other.

The impact this letter has had is significant. Churches and church councils have responded, mostly quire favorably, to the letter. Academic institutions such as Yale and Georgetown are deeply involved in providing continuing interfaith fora for discussion. Yale was among the first to issue a public response, and both universities have hosted conferences on the *Common* Word initiative. The level of engagement of the so-called track II type of diplomacy is very high, reflecting the seriousness with which the letter and invitation was sent, and the need it expressed given contemporary circumstances. In international relations, the attention it has received at the US governmental level is perhaps not as visible as the civil society engagement on it throughout the country, but certainly other European countries, such as Spain, have been more prominently involved in addressing the spirit of the letter. In the Middle East, the Royal Institute for Interfaith Relations, an institution that is under the patronage of the Jordanian Prince Hassan, organized the conferences that led to the letter being issued, and Prince Ghazi has paid particular attention to the follow-up for the Jordanian government. At the same time, the Saudi Arabian government has taken the opportunity of renewed and vigorous dialogue to host its own conferences on Muslim-Christian relations and on interfaith relations more generally, convening conferences in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Spain. Jordan and Saudi Arabia, at least, have taken on the issue of improving interfaith relations and have been very serious about it within the agenda of their governments. This letter and the response is a clear example of the idea of complex interdependence for, while the letter may not have an immediately direct impact on arms sales, military base planning, or foreign aid, it demonstrates the layers of relationships that do in fact exist among peoples and governments of the world.

Moving toward conclusion, I will return to the topic of the dichotomy of Muslim World and the West. I have already presented the Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington paradigm and some of its criticisms. There is an entire school of intellectuals that outright reject this paradigm. Two of the more thoughtful and insightful scholars of Islam and of the Middle East and Southern Asia are Prof. John Esposito at Georgetown and Prof. Juan Cole, at the University of Michigan. Both of these professors are critics of the paradigm as articulated by Lewis and Huntington. Each, in his own way, has worked to educate students and society about Muslims, Islam, and the Middle East. Each has made important contributions to this very discussion through recent work they have published. Juan Cole's newest book, *Engaging the Muslim World* is a book that addresses issues related to the Middle East and Southern Asia, such as so-called "Islamic" oil, Muslim radicalism and political engagement, Iraq and the new place of Islam in a country that has experienced a major trauma in its governance, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Iran and the Shi`i impact. The chapters deal less with Islam as a religion broadly-speaking, and more with the policy issues related to various parts identified with the Muslim world.[28] The title of Cole's book perpetrates the idea of a self-contained and homogenous Muslim world. It is interesting, that, even among critics of the paradigm, the bifurcation of the world into the West and the Muslim World has gained traction and is now common parlance, but is not necessarily helpful. Cole's content and analysis effectively debunk the idea quite thoroughly, though. The second work, jointly edited and compiled by John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed is the result of

six years of polling carried out by Gallup in more than 35 countries with majority or significant Muslim populations. Their book is entitled, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think.* The work makes a significant contribution to how to understand the great diversity of belief and opinion among Muslims on issues of democracy and democratization, radical and mainstream religion, *jihad*, and relations with the so-called non-Muslim world.[29] In an article about the results, they conclude as follows:

> In light of our broad-based data, we now know how to create public diplomacy programs that are informed by what people *actually* think and want: respect for Islam and Muslims, technological and economic development, more sensitivity to the implications of strong, visible support for authoritarian regimes, and diplomacy—above all—rather than the threat of military intervention.[30]

This work has and will change readers' perceptions of Muslims, adding much needed nuance to the discourse in a very accessible way, making policy suggestions and implying ways for non-Muslims to engage more knowledgably with Muslims. It contributes further to the idea of complex interdependence with interfaith relations as a major component.

Let me conclude with a few points and a brief anecdote.

1. International relations is more complicated than preservation of national interest. It involves a myriad of relationships and engagements that combine to form webs of interaction. Foreign aid, military power, and protection of interests are important, and perhaps central, in creating foreign policy, but these are not the only factors taken into account in nurturing international relations. Foreign policy should, but does not always, take into account the more complex web of international relations.

2. In international relations theory, complex interdependence describes this elaborate web of relationships among nations that is not limited to government-to-government channels, but includes economic, social, non-governmental institutional, and personal, as well as diplomatic connections. Educational institutions and religious communities and the international connections we nurture are examples that transcend, and even sometimes contravene, governmental relations.

3. History is marked by the intersection of religion and interfaith relations in international relations and politics. While much of the contemporary discourse is about Islam and the West, we must be mindful of a long history of religion impacting world events and international affairs. The intersection of religion and politics, especially international relations, has, to say the least, not always been positive. Even if collective public memory and recollection of history in the US is short, we must be sufficiently aware of historical reference points such as the Crusades and the Holocaust, as well as current events and the impact of US policy on communities abroad.

4. Educational and religious leaders are often eager to be more involved in adding perspective to the policies and relationships governments formulate and nurture. Religious communities and educational institutions have unique experience that can be drawn upon for more complete and nuanced understandings of the world.

5. The framing of relationships, though an IR lens or an IFR lens, is crucial. In our contempory age, because of the focus in the post-Cold War era on Islam, international relations are regularly framed through civilizational lenses: the West and the Islamic or Muslim world. How helpful are those metaconcepts? Do they inform or distract? Clearly, neither the "West" nor "Islam" is homogenous. Neither the foreign policies and interests of the Western countries, nor those of the so-called Islamic world, are singular. In whose interest is it to frame conflict in oversimplified religious or civilizational terms?

Soon after September 11, a local pastor called me and said that his congregation wished to establish a relationship with a mosque in the Middle East to express solidarity with Muslims. I told him that Muslim-Christian relations are indeed strong in the Middle East, and we participate in them through our partners in the region. It might be more helpful for your congregation, I told him, and for potential Muslim partners, to find a mosque locally. Such a relationship would certainly be of value and more personal for all involved. He readily agreed. His intention was to make an effort to build a stronger web of relations across national and religious lines. Such efforts are, in fact present in complex interdependence, but require greater general awareness everywhere.

In Iraq over the past 6 years, more than 4 million people have become refugees in other countries or internally displaced due to the unrest and insecurity there as a result of the invasion and occupation. The Christian community of Iraq, roughly 4% of the pre-2003 population of Iraq, has disproprotionately suffered. Churches have been attacked and people threated with death if they don't pay a large sum of money, leave immediately, or convert to Islam. We know that radical expressions of Islam have taken hold in Iraq in ways that were predicted. In many cases, these attacks on Christians have been attributed to groups opposed to US policy of invasion and occupation. They have attacked churches, seeing them not as sacred places of worship for Iraqi Christians whose community has lived in Iraq fro nearly 2000 years and whose leaders were opposed to the war in 2003, but as symbols of the Christian West and its policy—and therefore as legitimate targets of resistance to the occupation. If only perceptions were different....

This example demonstrates how the world in which we live is variously perceived and framed through political or religious lenses. Interfaith and international relations are not separate. They do inform each other—negatively and positively. The Muslim leaders' letter calls for dialogue and peace among peoples and nations. May this call be heeded not only by the religious communities of the world, but may the principles it proposes be taken up by those who create and implement policy.

Endnotes

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[13] Huntington.

[14] Huntington.

[15] Huntington.

[16] Translated transcript of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's March 31, 2002 televised speech, available online at: http://www.adl.org/israel/sharon_speech.asp.

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[20] Feisal Abdul Rauf, *What's Right with Islam is What's Right with America: A New Vision for Muslims and the West*. (New York: HarperOne, 2004), pp. xviii & xx.

[21] Abdul Rauf, pp. 287-288.

[22] Abdul Rauf, pp. 288-291.

[23] The full text of *A Common Word Between Us and You* is available online at: http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1255694851574&pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull.

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