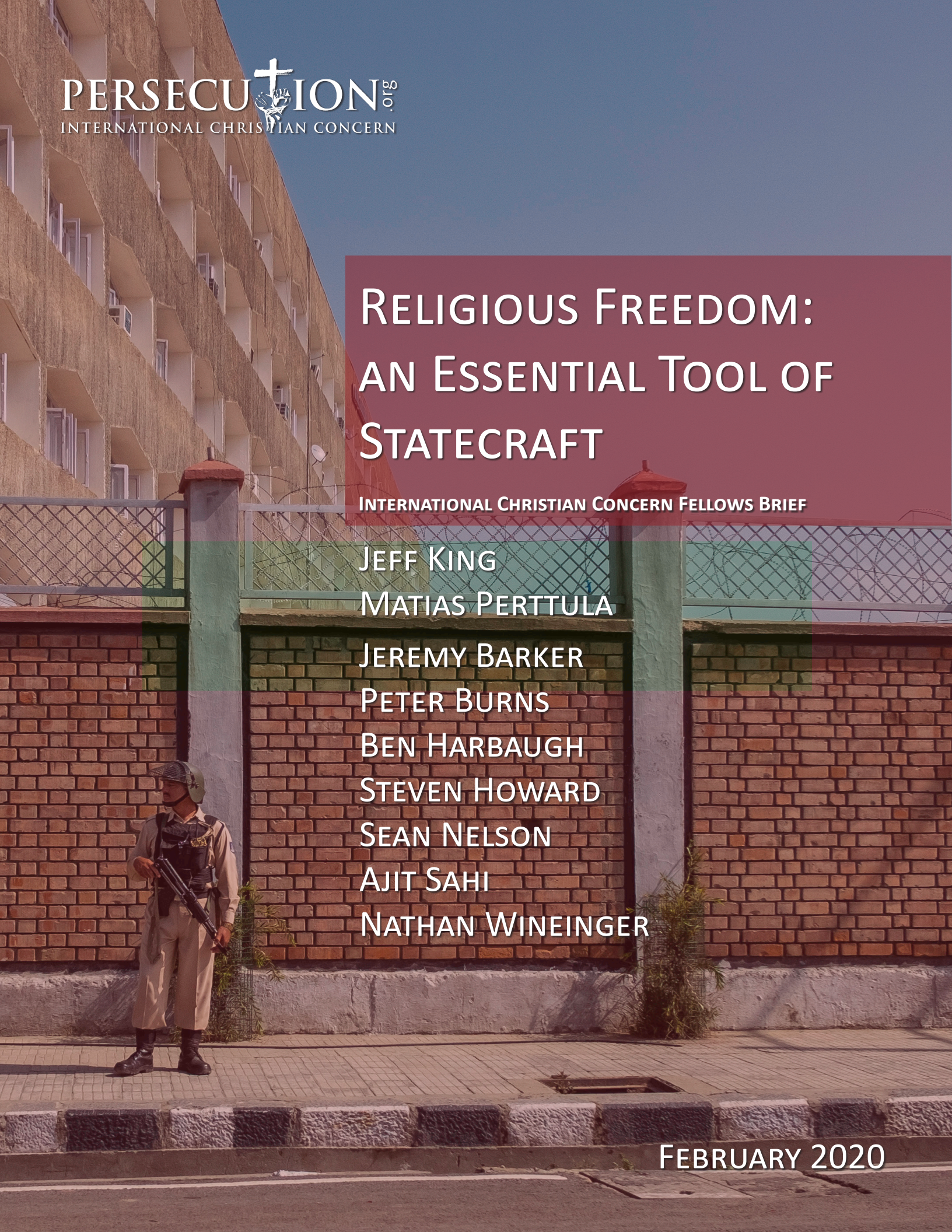

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Religious Freedom: an Essential Tool of Statecraft

International Christian Concern Fellows Brief

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On January 31, 2020 International Christian Concern convened a group of Washington D.C.-based experts to discuss the role of international religious freedom in U.S. foreign policy. The discussion began with a conversation about the broader U.S. foreign policy strategy and how religious freedom fits within it. It then turned to the key challenges facing the further expansion of international religious freedom around the world. Finally, participants gave their key policy recommendations and a few concluding remarks.

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The U.S. needs to reassess when and for how long it grants exemptions from the consequences of CPC status. The exceptions act as enablers to continued discrimination against religious minorities. The consequences of a CPC designation are intended to deter further persecution and encourage broader behavior change for the state in question.
- The U.S. should employ more mechanisms like the Global Magnitsky Act to keep violators of human and religious freedom rights accountable. Both governmental and non-governmental perpetrators should be singled out by these sanctions.
- The United States should leverage existing aid to put pressure on countries known for religious persecution. Foreign aid is a key U.S. diplomatic export, and behavior change is unlikely as long as it flows to offending countries.
- Greater institutionalization of the international religious freedom structure in the background of the U.S. foreign policy structure. While the 1998 Religious Freedom Act ensures some degree of institutionalization there is need for more progress, including in the training of U.S. foreign diplomats to identify persecution issues.
- The U.S. should deepen partnerships with a broad array of civil society, faith-based, non-faith-based, and human rights groups on the issue. By doing so, the U.S. will be able to respond better and more proactively to the situation on the ground facing religious minorities and other believers when their rights are violated.

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On the cover: A police officer patrols a government building in Kashmir, India. The conflict in Kashmir is influenced by the lack of religious freedom in India. Credit: ICC Fellow John Fredricks

Welcome and Introduction

Matias Perttula: First of all, thank you for coming. It's really a joy to host all of you here and I am looking forward to hearing everybody's thoughts. This concept came from something I've been thinking about for some time, which is to bring together non-governmental leaders, think tankers, and others who work on international religious freedom issues and actually deal with the policies that we're going to discuss today. I want to capture that raw perspective and deliver it to the actual policy makers who are crafting these decisions. Even if you go back to 1998 when IRF was formalized in the Frank Wolf Act, it has always played a background role and hasn't been really prioritized to the extent we see today.

IRF has been a niche issue for many Washingtonians and policy analysts and to anybody working in the foreign policies structure, but with this administration, especially with Brownback's leadership, it's really gained a lot of prominence. And of course, with the leadership of Secretary Pompeo who is a strong supporter of the issues. And Mike Pence, who also cares deeply about all issues surrounding the persecution of religious minorities. This administration has really brought a great deal of prominence to IRF and to the whole Foreign Policy calculation of the United States. However, I think that, while there's been a lot of movement like with the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom for instance—the largest human rights event that the State Department has ever put on—there are still a lot of questions.

Those of you who have read the actual National Security Plan from 2017 will know that the underlying basis for that is America First. But at the end of it there's the fourth component which is advancing U.S. interests and values which, in my mind, IRF plays right into very naturally. Obviously our constitutional values of religious freedom and pluralism, and cultivating that mentality around the world with our allies as well as those who we hope to cultivate as allies in the region, is a big component of our value-based leadership. But all of you know that IRF, from Africa to the Middle East, through the ‘stans and into Asia, is facing a lot of challenges, especially in terms of how the U.S. actually hopes to or is trying to engage countries to advance this freedom. I hope to engage on this a lot more through today's conversation.

There has been a good deal of action that has already been implemented. The State Department is moving to implement some of them already, but I invite you can go deeper on the issues. Again, your grasp on how policy plays out and can be changed is what we want to gather from you.

But just to quickly go over the three phases of our discussion: what is IRF and why is it critical to U.S. National Security? I'm not sure that this question has fully been answered and I'm sure that we can contribute to that in this discussion. The second phase will address the key challenges in promoting further expansion of IRF. So this is where I would love to hear from your regional expertise. We have Middle East experts. We have legal experts with background on Global Magnitsky Act and its uses and implementation. We have experts on Africa and the various

difficulties of moving forward with religious freedom and the ethnic, cultural, and regional challenges it encompasses. We are also seeing concerning trends in Asia and South Asia where all of you command a great deal of expertise. In the areas, countries, and regions that most of us work in there are some great power complexities that go into that as well.

So what does IRF in these areas mean for U.S. policy in a global context? And how does the U.S. craft policy, in these particular regions and globally? How do we engage our allies? How do we engage foreign leaders where trust and cooperation is lacking? What does the prospect of a potentially new administration look like in terms of international religious freedom? All these components and others are welcomed in this discussion.

We can debate until the election day on what's actually going to happen. But there is a real possibility of a change in U.S. leadership. And to the administration's credit they've done a pretty incredible job with putting this issue to the forefront. Watching Brownback operate as an ambassador for this topic, he has gained global recognition and has really come forward as the lead on these issues. A personal win for me was seeing Pakistan finally listed as CPC. Just coming back from there it's even more of a confirmation that that was definitely the right move for the State Department.

We've made headway on incorporating the Global Magnitsky Act into IRF and it is gaining a lot more ground. The fact that IRF issues are even considered in the whole overall Global Magnitsky submission is a huge step forward, I think. And I have to take some pride here at ICC. We worked on the case of one Iranian judges who was recently sanctioned. I'm not saying that it was solely our work, but we did submit a substantial case file on this individual. So that was a big, big win for us. But anyway, I want to leave it at that with in terms of the context, the shape of the discussion. Again, it's not an enforced framework but more of a guide as we take this forward.

Phase One: International Religious Freedom in the Context of Broader U.S. Foreign Policy

Matias Perttula: Why don't we start at Phase One: what is IRF and why it is critical to U.S. National Security? When I thought about this question, it became ever more important in my calculus because this issue bleeds over into so many other policy areas. I read a lot on what U.S. National Security actually is right now and what the grand strategy is. A lot of debate on how effective the current strategy is, but there certainly are a number of priorities that I think are moving forward.

There is actually a lot of writing out there asking whether we even need a major grand strategy for U.S. foreign policy. I tend to think that we do. So what are the current strategy objectives for U.S. grand strategy and National Security? How does engagement on IRF-related issues contribute to a broader U.S. National Security agenda in various geopolitical contexts? And how does

advancement on IRF related issues impact you as grass strategy objectives? There's a lot of nuanced material in there, but what is IRF and how does it play into overall U.S. strategy? I leave the floor open with that.

Nathan Wineinger: I think it's important to remember the history of how IRF became a part of U.S. strategy at all. That history is actually very long and we can even point back to the time of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or Article 18, which continues to be the international definition of and for religious freedom. It's also important to remember that that was something that was pushed forward by different advocacy organizations. The different people showed up with ideas that put into what became the universal declaration, including members of churches. Members of churches, particularly Baptists, were some of those who were pushing for Article 18 to be included and it was a big push because there were various countries that had established religious traditions, in Europe those were Christian, or Muslim countries, that were very resistant to this broad, nearly heretical notion of religious truth.

And so that established it. And then, because of activists and because of the existential threat towards religious freedom presented by our great geopolitical foe, the Soviet Union. And the restrictions placed on different religious freedom actors that were increasing and egregious. Different people within the sector who had friends and colleagues who were religious actors in different countries, and also people from various NGOs, started to pay attention to this and agitated for the International Religious Freedom Act in Congress.

So congressional leadership (including Frank Wolf, but not just him; others as well) and NGO leadership built off of a legal framework that was established through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Act provided the legal platforms on which different governmental structures were built. For instance, the IRF Ambassador. So, in reality, there are several different things that IRF is, it is an idea, it is a legal construct, it is an institutional framework. It is an ecosystem of NGOs and actors that believe in the idea and its value to human beings and society. Those NGOs work to make the idea salient. All of those components are going to be really important in however IRF gets deployed into a strategy, whether that's considered the national security objectives or an economic strategy for the U.S. going forward, et cetera. Those three components, the NGO sector, the institutional framework, the U.S. government agencies, the interagency, the different legal tools and frameworks that can deploy are going to be very important.

So I would argue that IRF is not just religious freedom as a sort of abstract concept, but to actually activate it and make it meaningful it requires those other things as well.

Sean Nelson: I think, pointing to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18, is absolutely one of the right starting points with the current and useful definition of international religious freedom. I do want to add that this is religious freedom, right? This is in our DNA as Americans. UDHR, that's the 20th century. For us as Americans, this was the 18th century and it's right there in our First Amendment. And with two aspects of it: the state's not going to establish a church and force you to be part of that, and you'll be able to freely exercise your faith. I also want to read

Article 18 of the UDHR because it gives this very comprehensive idea of what religious freedom means.

And I think there's this idea now that the U.S. is somehow an outlier internationally, and has too broad of an idea of religious freedom. But just listen to what Article 18 says. First, "Everyone," Not just a couple people: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom either alone or in community with others and in public or private to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance."

That's broad, right? That is your religion, those are your core beliefs. That is being able to both worship freely in your own house of worship, and then to live it publicly. To be able to go out and practice, be able to teach about that. To be able to observe that in public. And when you see a lot of restrictions throughout the world there are some restrictions on the ability to worship, but a lot of repressive countries allow you to worship as long as you stay within your own officially sanctioned and recognized church. And outside of that, you don't talk about it, you don't put religious symbols up or anything like that.

The actual definition in the UDHR agreed to internationally in the ICCPR says freedom of worship isn't enough. That is not religious freedom. That's a core component, but that's not it. And so I think that's a very American value. And Matias, you raised this earlier, that when you're thinking about the national security strategy and the incorporation of promoting international religious freedom, those two things go together. Because it's such a core American value that also happens to be a core value for the international system. And I think when you hold more countries to that, to the promises that they have already made for decades, when you say you need to live up to those things, that brings them to the table, that increases dialogue there, that increases cooperation and doing that will increase national security. And when people stay out of that and say, no, we're not going to do that, then you begin to think, okay, there's something that is wrong here and let's look at that. Or when countries try to exploit some of the language in the ICCPR's Article 18 that talks about exceptions, and they understand these exceptions in an overbroad rather than narrowly tailored way to justify their own religious freedom violations, those countries need to be called out. But overall, the rights-based focus, it can bring a lot more people to the table. I think it has to be a core component.

Jeff King: Yeah. You started with the founders there, and the UDHR—that's where you hear the echo of the founders, right?

Those ideas are so potent and that's why they became universal. They're inalienable rights from God. And I think we're so used to it. It has rattled through the West. It has made deep penetration in the West. But I think we've lost a little perspective that that's the moral high ground. And these rights are universal. So just think of three countries. Think of Iran, China, and North Korea. And the discussion there always devolves into national security, just thinking about missiles. When you think about North Korea, it's like the moral high ground is that they're running a nation-sized

slave camp that rivals somewhat what the Nazis did. And yet the discussion devolves. It devolves down to missiles.

The architect of their system, their ideology, he defected and he said, “this is their Achilles heel.” And he designed it. He designed it as a binding framework to capture people's minds. And he said, this is the Achilles heel of this country and this system, this is how you take them down. And I think of the old Soviet Union, and the guys sitting in prison for freedom, for conscience. And when Reagan came out and called the Soviet Union an evil empire both those in prison and the intelligentsia said that's when they knew the war was over. They said that's when we knew it was going to fall, when someone finally called a spade a spade. Someone had spoken the truth. All these countries spend so much time on propaganda and on creating this lie of who they are, arguing that they are a utopia. But with China, just think about what they've gotten away with. I think we've lost some of the moral high ground because of our adventure wars.

It's such a potent tool in the war for truth and for identity in the war of ideas.

Jeremy Barker: One of the ways we've talked about this is to say that religious freedom is good for everyone except for tyrants and terrorists. And I think Nathan, Sean, and Jeff, all three of you did this. Linking it back to the historical architecture to this, and even coming out of the UDHR which emerged at the out of World War II, having seen massive atrocities because of, in part, identity issues around religion. These questions were coming up. If you listen to Representative Chris Smith or Frank Wolf or a number of others who talk about when they first got into this, it was Soviet dissidents who were oppressed. There's a whole range of ways in which the oppression was happening, but religious freedom was one of those tools. Promoting religious freedom is not the only thing that will address this repression. It is not a panacea. It's not the sole ill for everything in the world, but it's a way for exerting control by these authoritarian regimes. Often their repression of everything shows up on this core foundation of what you believe in and what it looks like to live that out in the most basic elements of life.

And so Matias, even as you're saying this, we look at grand strategy and great power politics. This is relevant. And the hearing earlier this week, almost every one of us really zeroed in on China, which is, in the grand scheme, a U.S. rival. But on this level of ideas and identity, this religious freedom is relevant to that competition in the world of ideas. And how can you let a country get away with blocking out billions of their own citizens and this idea of fragmentation and religious freedom as a way to put that forward, on a universal level in response to these grand challenges?

Within the national security strategy, this is something we would have loved to see not just as an add-on as a side footnote in the value section, but more thoroughly integrated throughout. But at a certain level, it's a principle that needs to flow into other things. So we'd love to see it elevated out of more of just an idea to inform national security strategy in a more robust way, the architecture of it.

And that's I think is where we'll go throughout the conversation today of how do we get the rest of government to realize this is relevant to their work. People at the Defense Department, and the Secretary of Defense's office at USAID and the administrator as they look at their foreign assistance, of what we've spent. We're up to, and it's a good thing, we're up to spending tens of billions on religious freedom programming every year. You spend, at a bare minimum, hundreds of millions on democracy and governance and how can you think about good governance without that stuff? We're going to spend massive trillions of dollars of trade deals and not think about the technology implications and how this is oppressing them. So getting to enforce all of these levels is where we go, but it does start with this idea that's universally ground and then it needs to inform that strategy. Breaking into those sectors is, I think, the challenge we'll get to into from my perspective.

Matias Perttula: Something that you brought up was the NGO framework and the institutional framework that are the core components. I think, in terms of the institutional piece, something that we can't ignore is the level (or lack thereof) of development in a lot of the countries and regions that are dealing with IRF issues and how much of the development of the population as a whole—the education, the societal advancement of individual cultural context—plays into how religious freedom can actually thrive in a country. And I feel like I'm dancing around the point a little bit, but religious freedom is greatly expanded through development. The more people are growing in their career, the more they're educated, the more they find they a have political voice and individual value, the more they find that they are an intricate part of the society, the more engaged they become in developing a holistic perspective. This paves the way to cultivating and accepting pluralistic ideas for the society as whole.

And I think one of the big things that's driving this thought for me was my recent trip to Pakistan, and seeing the religious minority community that is so marginalized from the majority community and how poverty stricken they are and how institutional issues in Pakistan continuously isolate their religious minority communities. Whether it's through job advancement, political disenfranchisement, societal biases and so on the reality of religious minority in Pakistan looks bleak. It's even ingrained into the main framework of governance where a religious minority, Christian, Hindu and so on, cannot be Prime Minister, cannot be President, cannot be Army Chief of Staff. What kind of a precedent does that kind of leadership set for the rest of society?

We met with religious minorities who were able to advance through society. They're becoming the leaders in their industry, but whether it was in the medical field or banking or business or management or entrepreneurship the constant discrimination against them from the majority community was a daily pressure point. Religious minorities can't even speak about their religion with the majority community. They can't share their faith, to put it simply. In addition, so many of the minority community in Pakistan, specifically, are confined to low-level jobs—sewage and sanitation workers and so on—because only religious minorities are hired for those jobs. "Non-Muslims only" is specifically said in these job postings. Hearing their stories and understanding just the sheer hopelessness of not being able to advance in their life, barely getting enough money

to feed their families and raise their kids, and so on, just speaks more and more to the fact that, because I'm a religious minority, I am not allowed to develop socially, economically, or politically in this country.

So I think tying development into what IRF means in the grand scheme of things is a major component. That, of course, ties into some things that we'll probably discuss a little bit later today in terms of what policies should we be introducing, what policies should the U.S. be enacting to engage with these countries. A lot of times that's a direct tie to foreign aid or to military aid. Is that going to harm the religious minority community by withholding it or is it going to actually advance them forward—how does that actually play out on the ground?

Peter Burns: So something I'll throw in here on the grand strategy idea. The U.S. has traditionally, and I'll just go back to Bush because that's really all I feel comfortable speaking to, had non-security related interests. In our foreign policy obviously the Bush administration had democracy promotion, the Freedom Agenda was a big idea that we pushed a lot and we spent a lot of energy on. Then the Obama administration, something that has kept coming bubbling up from conversations is that the gender issues were something that they raised a lot in discussions with other countries, concerning LGBTQ communities and minorities.

So what's interesting to me is that both of those are issues that I think did not translate well to the people, the audiences that we were pushing them towards. I think that religious freedom is a lot more universal and a better message for the U.S. to have as our flag, our forward facing value proposition. It seems like every administration has some sort of values-proposition they're making in their foreign policy. I think that religious freedom as a value proposition is something that other countries can find much more space to engage with and usually be more receptive to. Also, it probably is more representative of the international community, since America is one of the more postmodern states in the world, one of those trending away from religion being part of civic life as opposed to the rest of the world where it's still deeply ingrained in civic life.

So I think it could be the antidote to some of our mistaken attempts to thrust our values on other countries, and lately people would be really anxious about America running in and trying to clamp our values down on everyone we meet. It's almost an antidote to that. We're going in and we're not rushing in with a foreign value set. We're basically saying, "Hey, we recognize the importance of religious freedom to civic life all over the world. Your religion is important to you. There are other communities that are not receiving the same sort of opportunities to express that." I think that, as a grand strategy interest, the concern that I hear is this, "Well America can't run around the world, pushing its values on everyone." Well, this isn't necessarily doing that. This is more just carrying the standard on something that is already an internationally-recognized value.

Jeremy Barker: Yeah. I think that's a really interesting point. I've been thinking about it for a couple of reasons. One, in regards to the UDHR—one of the criticisms of it from some people (my colleagues and perhaps myself as well) is that there are these really useful propositions of human rights, but they're not tethered anywhere. Part of the debate in the drafting of the UDHR was whether to

explicitly ground this in something or do we get as close as we can, and leave that hanging out there. You had Eleanor Roosevelt on one side and Charles Malik from Lebanon on the other. Charles Malik wanted to explicitly ground these in a theistic tradition. Now, Roosevelt ended up being persuaded to back off a little bit and leave that as close to grounded as she could get, but still leaving it universally accessible.

To Peter's point, there is an element to where we're not saying you have to agree with this principle entirely, but, and Ambassador Brownback says this often, "You should be free to do with your own soul as you want." You should not be restricted in this. So as a Burmese Buddhist, be Burmese and Buddhist, just don't kill or coerce your Muslim neighbor. Don't coerce them, don't kill them.

Yet it cultivates these values and you have these trends of growing populism and nationalism, and a resurgence of national identity, even tied into the America First concept. Religious freedom isn't calling for an abandonment of the principles of what it means to be an American or a Brit or s good Hungarian or a good Indian. It's not saying, "Stop being that." It is a principle that lets you be fully that and also presses for equality for your neighbor and for others around them. So toward this idea that it's a useful value proposition to advance, that is it's assertive against injustice, but it promotes equality. There's something to that and it is, I think, an idea worth championing.

Nathan Wineinger: I would say, just a little bit of pushback on Peter...I do think that IRF actually is this thing that can be an antidote. But it's also a really big threat to the various people who are attempting to become tyrants or already are. We talk about religious nationalism, which I think is something that has surfaced in ways that really challenge religious freedom for minorities, but not just them. Religious nationalism challenges the faith communities that it claims to champion in those countries. If you look at what the Indian nationalists have been doing to Hinduism versus the many strands of Hinduism that exist there, you can see this very clearly.

But I also think it’s important not to just blame “religion” in these contexts. After all, there are obvious examples of it that aren't religio-nationalism. Indeed, anti-religio-nationalism exists. For example, China is probably the most egregious example of persecution in the world today, at least on sheer number of the oppressed. China's nationalism is anti-theistic. Remembering what Peter said. They're using identity, "You can't come in here, that's not Chinese. You can't have that idea, that's not Chinese.” Or in Pakistan, “You can't say that, that's not Pakistani." So this isn't true Pakistan, this isn't true India, this isn't true China. Oppression exists across the theological board. We see it in Christian communities, very unfortunate. As a Christian, I find that very unfortunate. We see it in Hindu communities, we see that in Muslim communities, and we see that in atheistic communities. By communities, I mean community power structures at the very top level. Ideologies and beliefs can be useful ways of exerting oppressive control—we are seeing that in the rise of religio-Nationalism, and in the resurgence anti-religio-Nationalism.

I think that while IRF does have this helpful antidotal quality, because it is assertive about justice but also tolerant and expansive about recognizing human dignity, I think that there are people for

whom human dignity is a stumbling block. Those people are tyrants. Lots of people who show up in power maybe wish that they had more control, that they had more authority, that they didn't have to respect constitutional bounds and legal bounds. In this country, it seems that any presidential biography I read, no matter how much they love freedom, get very frustrated at the bounds that they're fettered with. And I think that is true for this president, and President Obama, and President Bush, and on back. I think it's important to remember that as we're selling IRF as an idea that's useful and antidotal, there are real challenges to that as well.

Peter Burns: Maybe just piggyback really quickly and agree. One of the things that you raised is the fact that we do see those tyrants grabbing this and realizing it's a flag they can wrap themselves in, and use to win points in the international community without actually making any substantive change.

Steven Howard: I was actually interested in looking at the second part of this question and talking about national security. I think that, when we talk about U.S. national security and religious freedom, the two weaknesses have been that we haven't really defined it, and we haven't really dictated to other countries what our terms are for this issue. Both the Obama Administration and the Trump Administration had certain countries it was trying to deepen ties with and, as a consequence, they tended to overlook the issue of religious liberty to a certain extent in these countries. They also would tend to highlight religious liberty violations in countries with whom they did not share close relations.

The Obama administration was initially concerned with the way that the U.S. was dialoguing with the Islamic world after the Bush administration. There was a look to Turkey. The president sincerely thought that Turkey was the model that could be a symbol for what a moderate and inclusive Muslim country could look like. Then when push came to shove, although President Obama campaigned on recognizing the Armenian genocide, he bowed down to Turkish pressure. When he went to Istanbul he did not visit the Ecumenical Patriarchate as American political leaders customarily do. He instead invited the patriarch to visit him in his hotel.

The Trump Administration has done a good job of prioritizing international religious freedom, but has struggled to identify a consistent criterion they can hold all countries to and also tend to overlook religious liberty violations in countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates because of the close relationship the president has with these governments. None of these countries has made significant gains in promoting religious freedom, but they sponsor high-level delegation visits and conferences that focus on issues such as coexistence and tolerance while doing little to reform their own religious freedom violations. There is also an issue of USCIRF commissioners close to the president politicizing the issue by over-exaggerating the progress these nations have made in promoting religious liberty and overlooking their shortcomings.

The international religious liberty advocacy community should recognize the dangers of over-embracing these regimes and wholeheartedly endorsing their reforms. On one hand, it’s good they’re making steps to make their societies more tolerant. Coexistence and tolerance are better

than their opposing values. But we also need to be dictating to these countries, "We appreciate the fact, United Arab Emirates, that you want to build a church next to a synagogue next to a mosque, but your on-the-record punishment for apostasy is still death. Although you don't implement it, that's not exactly sending a good message to people around the world about what religious freedom means."

Secondly, it's in U.S. interest international security interest to have values-based relationships. This is not my idea. IDC has always held that our allies should share our values and we should not be doing whatever the UAE or Saudi lobbies us to do here in D.C. We shouldn't be basing our foreign policy based on Turkish interests either. Our organization always emphasize investing in countries that value this. When it comes to the Middle East, we really highlight Jordan and Lebanon as Middle Eastern countries who share American values.

Benjamin Harbaugh: I would like to expound on Lebanon as an example where IRF could be an issue critical to U.S. national security. Hezbollah has co-opted the state, arguably controlling most of the levers of power. If they were to steer Lebanon towards an identity as an explicitly Shia state, as opposed to the current sectarian system, the results would be catastrophic. If Lebanon were to become wholly Shia, I think you would see the exodus of many religious minorities, similar to the current situation in Iraq. In northern Iraq, according to a USCIRF report this last week, only 30-50% of religious minorities have returned to the area since the territorial defeat of ISIS.

If minorities continue to be pushed out of countries in the Middle East, it's likely that the region would become more intolerant, increasing the risk of conflict with Israel and by default the US. I think Lebanon is a very solid example of how IRF, or the absence of IRF, can have massive implications for our national security.

Matias Perttula: There was something that I think a lot of people are touching on here that I wanted to take a little bit further. There is a dynamic of domestic cultural components within each of these countries and regions and how, as you said Peter earlier, how much does religion and faith actually play in your public life? In the US and Western Europe, we can only make the argument saying that we're transitioning away from that, for better or for worse. That's a different discussion. I have my views, of course.

But in majority of the rest of the world religion and faith play a dynamic role in the way people conduct life every single day. We would be remiss as Western Americans to undervalue that component, which is something that I think that we too often miss in the policy stratus, when people are crafting foreign policy. When the U.S. is creating relationships with these countries the power of religion, the power of faith and how this plays a dynamic role in everybody's life, has to be prioritized and intentionally considered.

Then, coupled with the tradition of cultural religiousness in these countries, what does religious freedom look like in that context? We've seen various manifestations of this, especially in the populist leadership types that are coming to the stage. When religion is ingrained with a national

identity and within the national culture — whether good or bad — it begs the question, how do we communicate religious freedom into a dynamic like that? A dynamic where being of a minority faith is seen as a threat to the state as a whole, to the culture, to the norms?

Nathan Wineinger: It's not a threat. I want to repeat: It is not a threat. Religio-Nationalism (and anti-religio-nationalism) is actually a tool to distract the majority population from very real challenges.

The actual issues that the governments are responsible for: development, justice, accountability, basic fairness among citizens.

Anyway, but it is not a threat. It is described as a threat because it either A), distracts from issues that to solve would induce costs or decrease various privileges for the elite, or B) is a source of alternative identity that exists outside of the sinews of control that the established and insurgent autocratic leaders have worked to establish, or instance in China.

Ajit Sahi: I represent the Indian American Muslim Council. I myself am not Muslim, I am Hindu. I happen to be the only full-time paid professional working for a Muslim organization, which is a great talking point which I use every day. What Nathan said is absolutely 100% correct. In India, which is a big problem right now on the global map, there are 200 million Muslims. The second largest population of Muslims in the world outside of Indonesia is in India. In India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the number of is roughly one-third of the world's Muslim population. India has more Muslims than Saudi Arabia—three times more Muslims than Saudi Arabia. More than twice the number of Muslims in Egypt, the largest Muslim-populated countries.

It's amazing how well they live together, Hindus and Muslims, everywhere. It is entirely the government and entirely these forces that want to distract. Right now there are local elections happening in the capital city of India, that is New Delhi. In that city, when the incumbent government is not this Hindu far-right, Mr. Modi is not in power. They are trying to win that election. In a local election, Modi and his people are constantly talking about Pakistan, terrorism, Islam. I mean where people are talking about schools and people are talking about water, drinking water, sanitation he's talking about Pakistan. That's how crazy it is.

I think that with the U.S. administration, we are seeing a very interesting situation where the U.S. administration is, in the case of Pakistan and India, taking an approach that needs to be switched.

Most American people, if you ask "what is the U.S. government's attitude to Pakistan?" will say, "Oh, we don't like them." The truth is, today, the U.S. government is even closer to Pakistan than it has ever been in the past. The joint, or the chairman of the joint chief of staff, during his confirmation hearing in July said "On my watch, I'm going to strengthen the relationship between the Pakistani army." The group of four that's been meeting to hold talks with Taliban from Afghanistan, that includes the U.S., Russia, China, and Pakistan. Okay. But the U.S. government has, for the last several years, hidden how close it is to Pakistan. In fact, it talks more about the fact that it criticizes Pakistan for its IRF problem.

In the case of India, it is the reverse. It speaks more about its relationship with India, but does not want to speak on the issue of religious freedom. Just last month, we saw 31 people killed in police shootouts and 16 people killed in one single day. The U.S. government has not said a word. What I have been telling people in the State Department, what I tell the members of Congress when I meet them is there is a need for you to speak up as an administration, as a government, as Congress, for a very simple reason. Because whatever you want from India, is not going to happen if India goes up in flames in socialist territory.

Saying that the U.S. should think in altruistic terms and that our allies should share our values, forget all of that because the only goal that America has from India is the containment of China. If you look up the website of the Department of State on, I think 12th of November, they uploaded a document called Indo-Pacific Policy. It has a separate chapter on India. In the entire region, the subcontinent and the Far East, there is no country that is standing shoulder to shoulder with America like India is, not even Pakistan. Pakistan is great friends with China. Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, Thailand, even the Philippines, Indonesia, even Australia, none of these countries are willing to work as closely with the U.S. as India is.

That should be an opportunity, and that should also be a threat for America, because if India is allowed to go up in flames that is bad for America's regional goals. I find this argument gets quite a great response. So it is in America's interest to advance IRF issues around the world.

The one last thing that I want to say is that Indians are very, very mindful of how America looks at them, how the American news media talks about them. For some very strange reason, they have this tremendous fixation with a white Western world. They are constantly looking for validation.

Steven Howard: When you look at the two administrations, which approach to religious freedom in India has been more effective? I do remember that when President Obama went there he gave a big address on the issue.

Ajit Sahi: See, on 22nd of October there was a hearing at the congressional subcommittee in Asia Pacific in non-proliferation. Alice World spoke there. One of the questions that was asked by one of members of Congress, I think it was Sherman himself, that he made a point and Alice World said, "The relationship with India is not a relationship of dictation." These were her words. I think it's important to remember that India is a very large country. In fact, I am an Indian citizen and I would not want America to be able to force India. See, prime ministers come and prime ministers go. But if a president has said, "Well, America forces India to do something," that's going to be a bad precedent from my point of view as an Indian citizen. It should not be a policy of dictation and it has not been a policy of dictation, whether it was the Obama administration or otherwise.

Since Modi became prime minister the Department of State, under both Obama and Trump, has been really bending backwards as if that was as if sanctioning him was some kind of an original sin, banning him from coming into the U.S. Modi uses to great effect. His government keeps

reminding them that, "Hey, you guys are such idiots. You made a mistake by banning me. Look, I'm prime minister."

So they just don't want to up that government the wrong way. Also there's tremendous pressure from business law. India is a huge country. There's a huge economy. If they have great expectations from India, it is the world's fifth largest economy. The American power companies, utility companies, they want in on India. If you go to any of the seminars that they hold at Wilson Center and stuff, that's what you hear from them. The topping point's going ahead have to be number one is that, so for example, the one of the states in India that is really caught up in a great turmoil is the state called Assam. It's in the northeast. It has the largest border with China. China claims part of that state, Chinese army often intrude that state. So the argument is that if that state is going to go up in flames in Hindu-Muslim fire, then India is going to be inoperable for US geostrategic interests, especially in the Pacific interests.

The second argument is that India's economy has taken a nosedive in the last six months. I remember there was a gentleman, I forget his name, who has been making the argument that that religious freedom and economic progress are linked.

I think that's the kind of argument that works very well in the case of India. Then India's economy is currently crashing and that is something again that can work with the American state coordinates because it is wanting. I mean IMF has just put out a statement, the chief economist of IMF, International Monetary Fund, she happens to be an Indian origin person, Gita Gopinath. Last week and that was in Switzerland, she gave a statement saying, "It is India's economic decline that is pulling down the global economic growth." That's what she said.

Jeremy Barker: So lots of that was very good. One thing was that in your conversation, it was jumping between the two approaches to the issue in a sense. I know there are different views on how the previous administration handled religious engagement at the state department. You had these approaches previously embodied in two different offices. One was the IRF Office that was far more of the critical, a name and shame approach, in addressing the issue and the human rights dimension in a more critical approach. Then the Office of Religion and Global Affairs, that was more a sense of the broader role of religion in public life and taking a more positive but less confrontational approach to the issue. I think we've often tried to make that case; religious freedom is good for your economy. At the same time also criticizing where there are shortcomings and to be able to in the same breath or at the same meeting say, "The social hostilities that are tearing apart your country apart."

Or we say, "We're trying to help you address that." We're saying, "You need to do your job and stop people from killing each other on the streets and this will help." So the tension emerges in how to structure that, how to balance those approaches because we've often seen in many cases the value is tied to make evidence-based arguments that embracing religious freedom is good for your economy. It'll help you address these social hostilities. It'll help increase economic outcomes. So making that in a positive way while also being honest about the shortcomings and valence, it

creating this tension or cognitive dissonance that I think we have to take into account whether it's a good cop, bad cop approach and who can do it, whether one office can do it, whether civil society does one role and the government the others.

I think that's part of the challenge that we may need to turn to as we get to policy actions or ways forward. But as we were talking about it the jump from both resonates with me, but how to bring them together is a question still in my mind.

Even statements from the U.S. president will not work as well as sanctions because the enablers, especially in the context of India, are the bureaucrats and the police officers. The bureaucrats and police officers just love to be in America. If America cuts them off, Europe cuts them off. Not just them, but their children, their sons and daughters. If we get them, if one or two people are sanctioned it's going to drive the fear through the entire ranks.

Sean Nelson: I want to make one last point in terms of our engagement with the broader U.S. and international systems. Matias, you had asked, "How does that system interact with the domestic and national component where the dynamics of faith are far more potent?"

You could say that, in local areas, the reticence in Western internationalist policy discussions to discuss religion, to think that religion was a motivator of people's actions, that instead it was the material basis of things that were really driving people. Now certainly poverty, lack of economic development, corrupt political institutions are important things and they even interact with religion. But in any case you can't just exclude religion—you can't do it, just like you can't talk about religion isolated from all these other things.

We talk about different situations. You think of China where it's a communist atheist regime that wants to make sure everybody else puts the state before their religion at the same time that they are promoting this as a nationalist thing. Or you think of India, where you have this particular kind of hyper nationalism, even though all the religions that are there have been there for centuries. You think of Nigeria where there's been a long period of coexistence between indigenous religious groups, Muslim groups, and Christian groups, and now it's a very unique situation because there's almost an even split between Muslim and Christian populations in Nigeria. But I think that at the international sphere there was, until the last decade or so, a reticence to talk about religion.

I think that a lot of that reticence seeped into the documents at the international level. If you're in a developing country you feel that, because of aid and development and security help, you have to accept whatever was written in these 500 different comments and commentaries on various human rights articles that often don't take into account religious beliefs, developed by people who all went to the same five colleges in Massachusetts and the UK.

So, it felt like this on- size-fits-all thing, and that some of the values were being imposed without real warrant. And that isolated these more religious countries. Recently, and especially with the U.S. administration but you also see it in Brexit, there's this return of the import of the nation and

this feeling that by having more robust nation-to-nation discussions that don't just get channeled through one international system you can actually get to some of those more specific things, those areas that had been blocked off because they weren't in line with one particular set of contested values and procedures. So, I think that's going to be really interesting as it goes forward. This ties into the Global Magnitsky Acts which are getting developed now. They're getting adopted by different states—most recently we've sent a letter to Australia because they are considering adopting a version of the Global Magnitsky Act—and that follows this idea of a sanctions regime that's being adopted by individual states outside of the international UN system. That's the new thing and really an interesting development and, it seems, at least in the couple of years it's been developed, to have had some effect.

Matias Perttula: The U.S. has a structure which defines a clear separation between church and state. That doesn't mean that the two don't interact—they do. But governance systems around the world from country to country have systemically interlinked the two. Many have a national religion or state religion that's considered as such and this can have a significant impact on religious freedom. Any thoughts or comments on that?

Nathan Wineinger: This leads into that question. And I want to get it on the record, earlier Matias had mentioned how religion in the rest of the world is very integrated in addition to what you just mentioned about the legal establishment of an official faith. And in the U.S. we have religion very categorized and segmented (e.g. The free exercise clause, the establishment clause et cetera) for important historical reasons. In the rest of the world that doesn't always exist, and for American foreign policy and as deployed by diplomats and—when they come from these four or five colleges they all have been taught the same lessons by professors in very similar schools of thought—the diversity of their thinking is too often limited. Not to put too fine a point on it, but they're all in the same echo chamber.

Beyond the intellectual understanding, and perhaps underlying it, many diplomats have diminished the role religion plays because they've made personal choices for themselves that it doesn't matter, or maybe they secretly hope that it doesn't matter for the future because they don't believe in it. When they show up with that perspective that's been inculcated in the West, it is a form of intellectual neocolonialism. To confront this, within our frameworks, we must learn to recognize and segment our audiences. Are we talking to the Defense Department? Are we talking with the State Department? Of course, we're going to talk about different policy structures for different agency audiences, but we also, in the same way that Sean was bringing up the possibility through bilateral relationships to have more granular conversations that are more and more locally contextualized. We also have to recognize logical contours of ideology and use frames that are recognized by the different ideological spheres.

If I'm speaking to a colleague who comes from a left or center-left perspective whose ideology is rooted in the challenges and rights violations that occurred through imperialism, bringing up neocolonialism is a very helpful way to help them frame what we're talking about in ways that

they're already bought into. So, I think that we have to think about that, and it's not only just a rhetorical device, it's also accurate. It is a particular description of a thing that's actually happening. So, I think that we need to, as we're working on IRF issues, as we're figuring out how to get IRF integrated into grand strategies, we need to contour them not only to the local context about what's going on in reference to universal standards that we care about, but also to the ideological frameworks that people are using to arrive at their agendas.

Jeremy Barker: Yeah. I think that's right on. And we haven't started really disseminating this, but a guidance-note, we were asked to produce for the UK government for DFID, their development agency, and one of the things that they were wrestling with, they were looking specifically at religious minorities in conflict and crisis situations and how to respond to this. Anecdotally, they're hearing from religious minorities including those that they've labeled as survivors of genocide, that they were still being excluded from their assistance programs. The response was "We feel like we're spending lots of money on this issue, so what's the breakdown?" And there were systemic issues and part of it was because of all sorts of ideological biases that were coming into their grid, they were overlooking the vulnerability of these communities as communities. So, there is a need to help think through the ways we adjust our programming and our thinking to make sure that when we spend money in these areas that it gets to those communities affected.

One of the things they asked for was a charter of principles that they can hand to an implementing partner along with the $10 million grant for whatever program. They can also say it includes clear principles for how we want those implemented. Some of them were just simple things like fair and equitable access to funding that some people aren't actively included in because of these factors and just putting some of those principles into place that perhaps unconsciously, sometimes actively, sometimes consciously, there are levels of exclusion that are happening because of this. It may be a "religion avoidance syndrome", as some people have labeled it. So, getting into ways to address that in language that taps into those ideological frameworks that they're coming from, but that are also accessible within the same the frameworks. There may be calls for blowing up the entire international humanitarian system.

It may be justified; I don't know how to get there yet. So, pending that, whatever ways we can make modifications within that. I mean USAID has a rule that's fairly simple and straightforward. It should be implemented and we've actively seen people make First Amendment arguments that say, "No, we can't work with you as a faith based, as a local religious institution, because of our First Amendment prohibition." USAID explicitly says exactly the opposite. They've done it for-

Nathan Wineinger: Supreme Court decisions have said the exact opposite.

Sean Nelson: With USAID, in January, they gave notice in the Federal Register for a proposed rule to place faith based organization when it comes to foreign grants on an equal footing with non-sectarian groups.

Jeremy Barker: So, there's ideological work to do. In Sub-Saharan Africa either 50 or 70% of all health care provided is by faith based providers. And you're going to actively exclude that from all your foreign assistance? No, that's insane. So, it already exists, but there's work to be done on advancing principle arguments for working within the system.

Well, that's a part of how this gets embedded in the structure.

Steven Howard: I just wanted to add this: Again, our focus is mostly just the middle East, so mostly related to that region, but there's a really good working paper out there. I know Jeremy, you're familiar with that. It's from Peter Mandaville and Shadi Hamid called "Islam as Statecraft." It's very important to realize that most of the competing powers of the world use religion as a part of their foreign policy and they play a bigger role in their foreign policy than ours does. It's an excellent paper, but in the middle East, in particularly, if you're talking, Saudi and Turkey are vying for influence in Sunni countries. If you're looking at Iranian engagement with Shia communities. Even if you're looking at Russia, literally in Syria when Russian forces are occupying Sunni towns, they're using Chechens as their local security force because they can engage with the people in a better way.

So, I think that our competing powers are using religion as statecraft and they're not nearly as altruistic as we are about religion or foreign policy. So, I think, really forming an ideology that does not use one exclusive religion as statecraft, but that uses religious freedom as a form of statecraft is crucial.

Jeremy Barker: Yes, it taps into that historical narrative that America was founded by people who saw the impact of religious oppression. Madison and Jefferson were writing these foundational documents on religious liberty because they were talking to the Baptists who were getting horsewhipped down the street.

And, in promoting religious freedom as an American ideal, it's not that there's some golden age of religious freedom that we're going back to. It is that we've seen the chaos, we saw this happen in our own tradition and that's why we care about this principle. As Americans our religion as statecraft is religious freedom as statecraft. I think there's a rhetorical device to use there that is tied to our American heritage and the diverse nature of religious communities here.

Religious freedom as statecraft.

Phase Two: Challenges to International Religious Freedom

Matias Perttula: Okay, I do want to move us forward into Phase Two. I think we've already jumped into a lot of it and I'm almost tempted to start bleeding in Phase Two and Phase Three because they're very interlinked, which is then identifying those key challenges moving forward.

So, we might be even rehashing some of that which is no problem. But then bleeding that into what are the policy actions that the U.S. can take to advance of in all the specific areas that we've discussed, whether it's regional issues or it is domestic issues. What are the challenges for further expansion? Again, we touched on that, but feel free to touch on it again. And what is the coherent or good policy actions the U.S. should be taking in these regions?

Steven Howard: Sanction waivers on CPCs in the USCIRF report. Our plan was to focus, especially, on Saudi Arabia. I think that's a very clear area where pressure could be applied from our group.

Nathan Wineinger: And that pressure was what moved the State Department to declare Pakistan a Country of Particular Concern, per the IRF Act. So, yes. Also, to think about what we could get when the sanctions are waived. How do we say to decision makers in the U.S., "Alright, you waived the sanctions, then let's go with a lot of GloMag sanctions on a lot of people," Let's find some people that nations who care about advancing human rights can sanction within persecuting regimes and so scare their elites, without actually sanctioning the whole country and bringing shame on the whole country. But how do you actually do an alternative and really press that case?

For instance, when we talk to the State Department we say, “Ok, you're not actually going to do what you should do on Saudi Arabia, but let's start seeing some GloMag sanctions as a policy alternative.”

Matias Perttula: Can I press, in terms of Nigeria, to define the issues and how to move forward in the context of the leading democracy in West Africa?

Nathan Wineinger: Well, Sean was with me in a meeting the other day where I questioned how much longer Nigeria can credibly be considered a democracy, and I questioned that because there are failings and concerns across a series of issues. On legislation, there's a social media bill, there's a hate speech bill, there's an NGO bill. All of these bills are aimed at making it harder for independent voices and information to get out that the government doesn't want heard. The national elections were delayed and because of that delay, people who traveled long distances to vote had to return to work and families. This disenfranchised massive amounts of people who were not able to return to their precincts when the election did take place.

Next, the latest round of regional elections in a private meeting, one of the election observers who's very respected within the industry, called it the most corrupt and least genuine election

that they have ever seen, and that other INGOs and local NGOs agreed. There are great concerns about power consolidation happening from the president's party. For instance, in the last local election, massive amounts of money were flooded into those local areas, for what most observers believe was to fund vote buying. We see massive increases of impunity and injustices. We see violence against civilians perpetuated by other civilians, by paramilitary groups, by criminal gangs, by terrorists. We see movement restrictions, reporting restrictions.

There's general fear among citizens of movement around the country, et cetera. There are prisoners of conscience. There is an extreme disregard for following judicial decisions, extra judicial killing of protesters, et cetera, et cetera. At what point do we notice that Nigeria is not really a democracy in the full-fledged way that we think of democracies?

I think as far as religious freedom plays a very big and important role in that, I think particularly in Nigeria, but I also think this exists in other places across Africa. We really have to remember that religion there exists very differently than how it exists here in the U.S., where particularly Protestantism helped set the tone of what religion looks like in this country, and within Protestantism and evangelicalism, “belief” is very important.

Evangelicals describe their faith as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ which, as an evangelical I also do. However, in much of the rest of the world, that's not what religion looks like. In our experience in this country religion is a countervailing identity across our deepest fault lines, primarily racial issues, primarily white versus black issues. In the U.S. many, many whites and many, many blacks share religious identity. In Nigeria, for instance, ethnicity, religion, geography, livelihoods, all of these things are stacked and mutually reinforcing. So, if something starts off within an ethnic space, it very quickly can become religious. If something starts off in a religious space, it can very quickly become a livelihood issue. So, I think when we deal with this, in African particular, we have to realize the religion shows up in different ways because it's people are born into their faith and they identify with their faith in a way that's very distinct from how most Americans conceive of it.

I think if you're talking about Nigeria, there are a lot of Cs that you have to think about. Colonialism, the heritage of colonialism is something that Nigerians talk about all the time, all the time. They are constantly talking to me about the problems the Brits created. We also have to think about corruption and kleptocracy. It is my view that a very significant part of the challenges that show up in Africa, and Nigeria specifically are because people view high office as an opportunity to get as much as they can and support their village or ethnicity.

So, instead of spending your energy and time on focusing on expanding justice and increasing the institutional frameworks that are needed to actually execute a viable nation state, you're focused on getting as much as you can. We also have to think about China. China is a very important player on the continent. We also have to think about donors—both countries and philanthropists. Jeremy mentioned earlier some of the reticence of USAID to deal with disparate impacts of religious freedom violations against disparate religious groups, even indicating that it violated the

U.S. Constitution to distribute funding to a faith-based group or church. There are Supreme Court decisions that say this is not the case (for instance, Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc. v. Comer) Apparently, some bureaucrats at USAID are better interpreters of the constitution than the Supreme Court. I think the Supreme Court might be surprised at this finding. To be serious though, that is not to say that it's all bad at USAID. There are very many people at USAID doing excellent work, but for some people who care about poverty, justice, and human flourishing there is a religious freedom and religion blind spot.

We also have to think about climate and the way that the changing climate is affecting how people live their lives. Beyond livelihood issues, this is going to be very important for communities where traditional African religions still play a deep part in the Muslim faith and the Christian faith because they understand the weather in the context of their faith. Then of course we have to think about the big bugaboo in the room, which is ethnicity. These are all components that don't specifically have to do with religion as itself, but within the African context broadly, and in Nigeria specifically, religions show up in myriad ways. For those of my friends who are more religious and see the religious issues first, we have to recognize that there are all these inputs into religious issues that show up.

For my friends who come from a secular humanitarian background, we have to realize that people show up every day with religion and they interpret the whole world through religion, and it is religious because they are bringing religion to the table at every single turn. And to deny that a particular issue has anything to do with religion is to again deny the way that people are living their daily lives and imposing a mere colonials' ideology and idealism onto a people who are living their lives in a completely different manner.

Matias Perttula: That's very good. Anything from the India perspective?

Ajit Sahi: I think the challenges for the U.S. policy are not specific to religious freedom in India. I think the problem is the worldview, the ideology and the worldview of the current government in power. It's not a just one. It's very insular at the core. It is a very insular ideology. This is a government that is premised on Hindu far-right ideology called Hindutva. This is not some random xenophobic ideology that you see anywhere or that just gained momentum because of the force of time. This is an ideology that has a specific start point, which was the year 1923. So the patron saint of Mr. Modi's government is a man who has been dead for 50 years. The ideology, there was a man who propounded this ideology in a book that he wrote on Hindu nationalism. It was called Hindutva, which is the Sanskrit word for internationalism.

This is an ideology of the book. There's a book which has set out the ideology. I don't think there's any such thing anywhere else, very clearly a political ideology is propounded and it is in this book and two years after this book was written in 1923 an organization was formed which is best known by its acronym, RSS. The RSS was founded in 1925, and it's currently celebrating 95 years of its existence. It has had 95 years. It has had only about five chiefs, the head of the organization, the current chief has been there since 2009, 10 years. One guy was there for 30 years, and this is an

organization which now claims millions of people as members and they have annunciated this ideology over decades. This ideology is basically this: Muslims are bad, Christians are bad. India belong to the Hindus; we are the original people. We were invaded by Muslims; we were invaded by Christians. The Muslims believe in Mecca, so their religious cultural icons are outside of India. The Christians believe in Jesus and who was not a native of India. These things are written down. These things they have practiced and preached and believed in and talked about day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, decade after decade. That's how it's going to happen. Mr. Modi himself, the Prime Minister became a member of this organization at the age of 10. The people who run this organization, the full timers, they take a vow of celibacy. They never marry, they have no possessions.

The head of this organization is a lifelong bachelor. They're all like that. So this is a very serious organization, and now they've come to a point where for the last six years they have been in power. This is the challenge. So, that is why when Mr. Modi came to power, he started implementing, for example, live show. Most of you know about the case of Compassion International which had been in India since 1954, it was kicked out immediately. Mr. Modi has cancelled licenses of more than 20,000 NGOs. Do we see foreign contribution? We all know about that. They are, increasingly, anti-conversion law across India. It is all part of the same ideology that has been established, it was been written down 95 years ago.

How do you counter that ideology? Because obviously it's been living probably for 95 years. It has adherence. It has people at all sections. Last week the RSS has started a military training school with kids as young as six years old. What are they training them? They are training them to kill Muslims. Of course, they don't say it openly. What they're saying is that this is training them for military. So, they want to infiltrate the Indian Army.

think Nigeria is a very good case, but I'm not sure if there is any other immigrant community in the United States, not the Pakistanis for sure, who are as violently in sync with the RSS. There is the Hindu far right ideology right here in the United States.

Howdy Modi is only one part. That's just a public expression. They are then administrations.

Joe Biden's man for outreach to Asian Americans is a man who is a member of the far right from here. His name is Amit Jinha. There was this other lady, I think, Nisha Biswal, or there was somebody else in the Obama administration. In fact, most Muslims, when I talk to them and I tell them that the Republicans are far more amenable and open to your issues of religious freedom, they're like, "Really? Are you sure about that?" And the reason is that the Hindu migrant community in the United States has a choke hold of the Democratic Party. That's why they were very shaken up when the Democrats started speaking out against the Kashmir decision because Kashmir is a different ball game altogether. So, anyway, what we are seeing on the subcontinent is, first of all, not some random xenophobia creeping in. It has been a plan.

You have to read what they wrote about Hitler. Of Hitler, they said, what we're seeing in Germany today is race pride at its highest. It is the right of Germany to want to create a pure nation of German people. They actually traveled to Italy, met with Mussolini, and came back and started a military school on the lines of the schools where the young fascists were created. That school is still functioning. So, this is something that needs to be understood in terms of India.

Secondly, I think if there is a way that we can link, in terms of approaching with the government here in the United States, if we can link Pakistan and India. So, one of the biggest reasons why the ideology of Hindu far right has caught on in India is because they're constantly pointing a finger at Pakistan and saying, "Look at what's happening with Hindus there in Pakistan."

We had a depression when the departing British partitioned India. A lot of, for example, a Sikh community, the turban Sikh community, the holiest shrine, or rather one of the two holiest shrines is in Pakistan. It was the birthplace of the founder who was born 550 years ago. And on the 550th anniversary, Imran Khan, what he did, the prime minister, is that he completely renovated that part.

Of course, in Pakistan we have seen over the last seven decades non-Muslim places of worship being completely taken over, destroyed, vandalized, converted into Muslim mosques and stuff like that. But what Imran Khan did was that he, and this was a great PR stunt by him, renovated that Gurudwara, it's called the Gurudwara, the Sikh place of worship. He announced a major opening and he was there and then Indian guys went there and it became such a great talking point in the Indian news media and people are saying, "Look, Pakistan is not changing."

So if we can put Pakistan and India together in our scheme of things, the way we see it, and if we can encourage Pakistan, and again this is the carrot-and-stick kind of a policy. If a country leader does something good, it might be worth a try for us to help get them some good media in America, get them a seat on some important tables here in America, that make them feel good about themselves. I think that would be something very good. Imran Khan, when he came here, he was interviewed at the U.S. Institute of Peace. He got some great coverage when he was here in July. I think that this is something that would go down very well in calming the tensions in the subcontinent. I mean, these are the only two nuclear power neighbors who are enemies, and the only other two neighbors are Britain and France, but they are divided by the English Channel and they are not enemies.

Benjamin Harbaugh: Other members of the panel hit most of the challenges I would identify. One discussion focused on unequal designation of countries as CPCs. Steven said this, but I wanted to echo his point that certain countries we partner closely with should be on that list. I believe that their absence grants them a legitimacy that they should not have. I think the main critiques of the current administration have been twofold; that they only care about Christians and that IRF is a guise for preferred political action.

Having interned in the IRF Office, I feel strongly that neither of those claims are true. However, there needs to a better response to critics when the movement is charged with politicization. I think it is important to recognize that it is more difficult to be critical of those you partner with, there is more at stake. What do we lose when challenging Cuba's human rights record? Not very much. That is no excuse for not designating a state as a CPC, IRF is part of the human experience and belongs to everyone. I just mention it to point out the complex reality of confronting a friend as compared to an enemy.

Phase Three: Policy Recommendations

Matias Perttula: On that vein, let's discuss U.S. policy approaches.

Peter Burns: I'll just throw out on Middle East here to expand on what Steven teased with the waivers. A big thing that we're considering is just how the U.S. leans into our friendships in the region with strategic allies that there are important reasons that we are close with them, but sees those as opportunities to hold them accountable to higher standards for their religious minority communities, as opposed to what has traditionally, I think, been seen as an excuse to give a pass. We need to create a sense of accountability in our close relationships. Realizing, that we're going to have more say over what happens in Egypt than Iran, as Egypt is an ally with an important strategic financial interest; whereas, Iran is an adversary at this point. So, how do we do a better job and how do we move away from this idea?

There really is a strong sense that, if you're an ally with a strategic interest, you get a pass on human rights and religious freedom violations from the U.S., and shift that to being, if you're an ally, there's an expectation of better behavior that comes along with that strategic and financial relationship. How do you, maybe, shorten the leashes, or how do you create leverage without approaching it in the sense of America needs to reject Saudi Arabia and Egypt and all these Middle Eastern countries that we have close, important strategic partnerships with, saying how do we turn those partnerships into an expectation of better behavior?

Steven Howard: This is true within Egypt, Saudi, UAE.

Peter Burns: Yeah. There's a list, for sure. It is theoretically true with Turkey. It's maybe TBD on what happens between the U.S. and Turkey.

Jeremy Barker: I would recommend a few similar things. In a place like Egypt or others, Jordan, as well, we have a major strategic and security partnership. Looking at ways that can be more flexible and whether we do training or policing and linking that directly to responding to and measuring metrics of response time on protection of religious sites, religious communities. Getting past the issue where there's a bomb attack on a Coptic church in upper Egypt, or abductions that are disproportionately targeting the Christian community being held for ransom and other things, or

you have the police force saying, "No, we don't have the resources to do it. As the United States being able to say, “We just wrote you a billion dollar check for humanitarian and security assistance. If you want to fly Apaches down there, you have that. We just paid for new ones." Use that sort of leverage to address some of these issues and where you're saying, "Oh, we're outgunned."

We should be able to address that. The criminal gangs that are running around doing some of these things. So, it requires more flexibility, which is something the Department of Defense isn't necessarily known for, but looking to how can we actually address these challenges. It also includes situating it in all of the principles we talked about earlier. The fracture points that exist in a society, that drive its fragility and show that they do care about these priority issues and saying, "Okay, that's what we're trying to get you to address." I think, a useful framework that is now law, the Global Fragility Act, does go towards some of this. It promotes a longer funding horizon, looking at important indicators, both in those crisis areas and also in preventative countries. What it will mean implementation-wise remains to be seen, but I think it's a useful approach. I don't know that explicitly religious freedom and the religious dynamics were in the language, but it ought to be there and part of the problems that need attention going forward. So, I'm generally positive toward that and we'll see what it looks like in the next 10 years.

Sean Nelson: I mean, on the Global Fragility Act, there were a lot of organizations that were supporting it, a lot of the very large human rights organizations, they also seem to be at least becoming more comfortable with this language of religious freedom and the importance of that. I think that's really good, and groups that take religious freedom as sort of a primary rationale for their existence should really make relationships with these groups to help push and mainstream religious freedom.

I want to talk about this. I think one of the things that is coming up with a lot of the different countries is this interplay between mob violence and on the ground localized issues and authoritarianism. Governments will often say, "Look, we have to act in this particular way. We have to have a heavy hand." Let's say Pakistan, we have to act in this particular way because there was a mob with 500,000 people and they're ready and out for blood.

Or you'll see this sometimes in India, the national government says “these mobs are acting on their own, they're localized, state issue not a national issue. If we go in there, it could make things worse, but at the same time, we need to make all these laws to make sure that all the groups live harmoniously. Using these religious harmony laws or anti-conversion laws or things like that.” And it becomes this feedback chamber.

What is often happening is that these governments are often looking for simply a pretext to justify their own human rights and religious freedom violations. They might be right that local communities show hostility to certain religious groups. But the governments’ responses often end up harming those same religious groups and create greater tensions and impunity for local violence, rather than putting a stop to local violence and aggression against religious minority

groups. Of course, the more the government undermines and violates human rights the more unstable these countries and local areas become, which ironically but ultimately undermines the governments' authority.

So, I think that interplay is really something we have to be aware of as we craft policy, as we do foreign assistance and really deeply monitor that sort of thing. And also make the point to the various governments that when they are able to, say, work with the U.S. in terms of training, especially for local law enforcement groups - I think of Egypt, where the government often says that it's local law enforcement, local judiciary, that's the problem. Then let's step down, step in there and do something about that and do real training. I think how you do that, more targeted assistance and really considering on a granular level the issues is going to require a lot more U.S. staff dedication and things like that in the state department, in the military apparatus, the whole national security group.

Matias Perttula: So, we are coming to the conclusion of the discussion. Excellent points, everyone.

Something that is a real issue for the U.S. is our public perception abroad. So, when the U.S. sells international religious freedom it's often cloaked in terms of: this is just U.S. foreign policy and U.S. influence in our system. There's an issue with the way the U.S. government sells things. Unfortunately, whether that's true or not, I'm sure there's history to back up some doubts from other foreign leaders and foreign countries. But there is a perception also that the U.S. is, yes we're pluralistic, but that we are predominantly a Christian nation. We are seen in that light whether we all agree on that or not—that's a different debate. The fact is that there is an imaging issue with advancing religious freedom around the world.

Any final comments on how the U.S. can package this issue better? How can it be sold in the contexts that we are operating in?

Steven Howard: Many of our organizations have struggled for a long time to emphasize that the issue of international religious liberty applies to people of all faiths and that we are not advocating for the prioritization of Christians at the expense of anyone else. Ambassador Brownback, to his credit, mentions this regularly. However, the president made comments during the 2016 campaign that were quite sectarian and discriminatory against Muslims. As an administration, they have done good work in elevating the issue of religious liberty and have even done a good job of highlighting the plight of the Uighur Muslim community in China. However, there is a certain impression that I believe that is indistinguishable from this administration and religion. They will always be viewed as favoring Christians over others.

While it is important for our organizations to work with the administration on advancing international religious freedom, we should also be intentional about framing the issue in a way that is inclusive of Muslims. A big connection here is the immigration and refugee issues. I think it's those six countries that we prohibited people from coming in from. World Relief has done great work in highlighting extreme declines in refugees who are religious minorities. I have

brought copies of a strong letter that International Christian Concern signed onto. If there is a change in administration this year, it will be important for this issue for our organizations to communicate to them the work we have done in supporting this human right for all people. If our organizations are seen as having been supportive of things such as this administration's immigration restrictions, then this issue may no longer be seen as a bipartisan one. We need to ensure it remains a bipartisan issue.

Lastly, we should be grateful that the administration has prioritized this issue and commend them for that. However, we also need to be mindful that we need to criticize them when they fail to live up to their own standards. If we do not do that, we will appear to be taking a partisan side when it comes to this issue.

Furthermore, in an election year we also need to be mindful that this issue has never been a partisan one. There has always been broad support for supporting religious liberty from both parties. In the divisive political environment we operate in, it might be most prudent for our organizations to take a strongly neutral approach. If our groups appear to favor the administration's approach in an election year, it actually increases the risk that the issue does become politicized and we lose Democratic support for our cause.

Nathan Wineinger: I agree that the apparent discontinuity between our refugee policy or asylee policy and supporting religious freedom human rights is a challenge. I think there's also just a level of ignorance, and I mean that in the real dictionary definition of the term, "lack of knowledge," from people across the country who don't know. For our friends on the secular left that don't know that religion is important in foreign policy, that it's important in everyday human beings' lives, and many of our friends on the right don't know that there are Christians in Iraq at all, despite the very good work of various organizations sitting around this table.

We don't have the massive budgets to be able to communicate and increase knowledge broadly. I think because of that, to help advance policy, we have to think about "the base." Community groups, and who are the core leaders within that community group that are supporting the Trump campaign or supporting whoever the Democrats nominate. I think specifically about Egypt, where the leadership in Egypt is able to do a tour for various evangelical leaders, and how wonderful that tour was for them, and how many great things they were able to see, when in reality there were whole groups of people who had very different stories to tell and they were excluded from those conversations.

I don't want to just blame our evangelical leadership friends, I mean I think that there are think tanks on Sudan who got taken for tours on how wonderful Sudan was and how much improvement on rights the previous government was doing. This is before the latest government there. But a few years ago we had a major respected think tank saying, "Well, Sudan is really doing its best." And everyone on the ground was saying, "No, it's not."

So, I think we do have to think as advocacy organizations, as policy organizations, not only how do we get to the leaders, but how do we get to who the leaders are listening to? How do we get to those people who don't just bundle funds but also those bundle votes through their influence? People who have podcasts, people who have cable television shows, people who have radio broadcasts. How as advocates do we show up and provide content to people who are framing the ways that American citizens see the world and the ways that they vote. This is not a partisan issue. It should not be a partisan issue, for a human rights issue like this to survive and make impact, it must remain bipartisan and across the ideological spectrum from far right to far left, and we need to work on that as a policy issue.

And to do that, we need to not just think about the leaders who are on the Hill, the leaders who are in the White House, the leaders who are in the State Department. We also have to think about the leaders that those officials listen to because they bring listeners because they bring viewers, because they bring readers.

Steven Howard: I have some concern for the USAID funding for religious minorities in Iraq if the administration changes. There are some progressives who assert that the U.S. is favoring Christians above other groups. This is unfortunate because this funding has strong, almost unanimous, bi-partisan support. I'm concerned this aid could get cut in some effort to reverse course regarding this administration's policies on religion and foreign policy. Peter wrote an article about this and I'd like to have him share some of his concerns.

Peter Burns: Well, yeah. Sadly, it, and I think maybe genuinely maybe not maybe as a political stick, has been selected as item to attempt to portray the administration as clearly giving priority to this one community that happens to in theory aligned with them ideologically. It's not representative of reality, either in actual aid dollars given, spent in Iraq or in actuality specific alignments. But it has become, as Steven said, a talking point. I think dispelling those narratives clearly with the facts is important. Because it is not representative of reality, it is a compelling political narrative and it makes for a nice headline. You could say someone got "Penced," whatever that means. You can make a nice political headline, but it doesn't actually represent reality, and in the end it's just as Nathan said—it just creates the space for a partisan debate that can become gridlocked to no one's advantage.

Nathan Wineinger: I think this exists in multiple fronts. We are coming off the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's reauthorization, which had, once it got moving, really great bipartisan support. So great that they authorized it in an appropriations bill, which *does not* happen. So, this means that there was broad support for people who were wanting to get it done and it happened.

There was a real challenge on the media narrative. I read articles that would be broadly considered from publications out of the religious right, that were accusing USCIRF of being nothing but a bludgeon for Democrats to project their terrible ideas onto the world, and I read

the exact same thing from an organization on the left, that this was just an opportunity for far right organizations to gain legitimacy and fans...

Matias Perttula: Both not helping the situation.

Nathan Wineinger: Both not helping the situation and both not accurate. The things that were reported did not reflect what many organizations who collaborate with USCIRF experience. This is something we have to think about, how as a community we confront being a community of NGOs and activists and agitators on this, because we work with USCIRF, you work with USCIRF, other people work with USCIRF. Are there challenges at USCIRF? Of course there are challenges. But are the things that we read in the news reflective of the broad positive work that we see? No.

So, please come talk to the people who are actually using these organizations, who are actually using this infrastructure, who are actually using the institutions in the law. But even when we were interviewed too often our perspective wasn't heard because our perspective was broadly positive and positive stories do not generate outrage and hence clicks, and views. So, we have to work to not only to develop, as I mentioned earlier, relationships with the people who are influencing the policymakers, we also have to start building friendships and capacity and trust among media outlets, particularly the ones that are likely to be incendiary on our issues. That's going to be a challenge.

I mean, I think that the Atlantic's reporting on religion is broadly really well done, and I appreciate their reporting. I thought that their piece that came out during the last Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom was completely off base. Their story had a headline photo of the president's meeting with evangelical leaders in the Oval Office at the beginning of the administration, which was not a thing that happened during the ministerial. What was happening in the ministerial was completely different and if the reporters had gone into the ministerial, which they were invited and encouraged to do, to see it, it would have been a very compelling thing. Sadly, and uncharacteristically for the Atlantic, they chose to rely on a narrative that helped drive clicks, rather than actually reported on what happened, where people from multiple faiths were given a platform, people from multiple ideologies were given a platform, and the message was constantly "religious freedom is for everyone." It means that we have to develop relationships with these people.

Sean Nelson: I think people need to push back aggressively on this notion that international religious freedom is somehow controversial, that protecting people who have suffered genocide, who get put into shipping containers in the Eritrean sun, who are detained without seeing their family for years on end in so-called re-education camps, who are imprisoned for doing nothing but saying that they disagree with some particular version of the ruling party's religious belief, all that stuff needs to be aggressively pushed back on. This is not in any way controversial. The International Religious Freedom Act got a lot of support once it got going. Frank Wolf Amendments, the same thing. Many of the bills we have, Democrats and Republicans, everybody supports these things.

And when actions are taken in support of international religious freedom based on these things that are right there in the law - we have good laws on this stuff. We have tough laws.

If there are people committing atrocities against a religious group, against an individual because of their belief or their lack of belief, we can do something about that, including specifically helping out those victimized groups. Unfortunately, there are still some people and organizations that don't want to recognize that many, many people are persecuted and discriminated against for their religious beliefs and religious practices. Some people only want to view things from a partisan, politicized perspective. But religious freedom is far beyond that. This is a fundamental freedom that is not protected for hundreds of millions of people or more. There are plenty of things in the overwhelmingly bipartisan IRF Act that say, "Hey, these countries need to be called out on." If you have ongoing, systematic, egregious violations of religious freedom, which is a fundamental human right, you need to be called out on, at a minimum.

There may be reasons we're not going to use the full board of whatever sanctions we could do, but let's at least call these people out, and we need to push back against this idea that there is anything in the least bit controversial about that. This is a topic that can unite every single American, that is currently uniting all countries all across the world, from Taiwan, to the U.S. From the UK, Canada, the EU. Just the groundswell of support over the last few years for religious freedom, internationally, has been incredible. So, that's my simple point. We have to push back aggressively.

Ajit Sahi: With people who are conservative or religious minded, talking about religious freedom appeals to them. But the left or centrists for them it's just the term religious freedom means different things to different people. So the use of the term persecution, I think that for those kinds of people works very well. I know about India; I know I see it here.

You talked about news media. I just wanted to talk to you about one more stakeholder. I think it's important to speak more about these things and I think therefore we also need to have a domestic agenda in terms of influencing public opinion stakeholders.

For example, I'm coming this morning from Detroit. I was speaking on the India situation at Wayne State University last night. I'm speaking at MIT in Boston on 14th, I'm speaking at Harvard on 15th, I'm speaking at Yale on the 17th and the plan is, and we are doing this as part of a conscious effort to take it to campuses. I can tell you a lot of people, a lot of students, a) they're so engrossed in domestic issues that they are not looking at the foreign issues and b) they're only informed as much as they are from their readings of the media.

So if you ask the students on any campus in this country, the average student, they will say, "oh yeah, Pakistan is a bad place, India is an okay place although there's something happening in India these days." If you ask them about Nigeria, I'm quite sure so many of them will not know about it. I think you might want to add campuses as a stakeholder to target going forward or the next year.

Steven Howard: I think too, just on the note of language, I think that this issue can be, you have to tailor it to your audience. So I think that, with progressives, what I have found is that if you emphasize that there's an ethnic or indigenous minority that's being persecuted you might see a very different response. You could talk about gender and that if you go to many of these countries, the woman who embody the quote unquote most progressive values in many instances in our region are going to be Christian women. They're going to be educated and independent in the workforce. I just wanted to note that I think just tailoring the message is important.

Ajit Sahi: ICC and my organization have developed a partnership thanks to Jeff and Matias, and Sean Nelson, we work together a lot. I think it might be very helpful, especially in the context of Nigeria and Egypt, if you could find Muslim organizations in the United States who are willing to work with you and talk about it, lend their name and their advocacy for Christian minorities in Pakistan, in Egypt, in Nigeria. I think that would be splendid. For example, one of our partners is a Hindu organization, which opposes Hindu right-wing work, so that works beautifully. That plays out because that is really where the heart of the argument that they are the sole custodians of the narrative in favor of that. So that's something I would say that you should do.

Jeff King: I agree. The issue of religious freedom is one that should find widespread acceptance across every segment of society because really, at the heart of the matter, the right to practice one's religion is fundamental to every person's freedom, no matter what creed you subscribe to. I agree with the other participants here in the room today and I think that the United States needs to overcome this perception that we are only for human rights as long as it serves our economic and diplomatic goals. And maybe that is the case sometimes, but if it is that needs to change. We need to push human rights for all, because human rights for some isn't human rights at all. We need to stay ideologically consistent in our messaging on this front and we need to stop giving an out to human rights violators, CPC-designated or not, that we want to court diplomatically. If the United States can't be consistent in its human rights messaging, how can we call out other nations?

I would also just like to reemphasize the importance of funding the tools that work—putting resources behind the efforts to sanction international religious freedom violators, for example. We need to put our money where our mouth is and really capitalize on the existing tools that do work and do help to slow or stop religious freedom violations around the world.

Matias Perttula: This last phase seems to be driving toward a point that I want to expound upon which is selling this issue to our stakeholders in the U.S. in the right way, which bleeds into all the work that Brownback, Pompeo and the rest have done on this issue which is to institutionalize IRF mechanisms into our governance. But there is an uphill battle with selling the issue to policy makers and the policy implementers. Creating a pluralistic approach to the whole thing is, I think, the key that most of you have spoken to.

Concluding Remarks

Sean Nelson: Matias and ICC, I think it's been a really fantastic discussion, and there's great opportunity in terms of what does the future holds. There's been such great momentum on international religious freedom especially over the last two to three years or so. And I think it would be an absolute shame for that to drop off once every country appoints their special envoy and then those special envoys just start issuing the same kind of statements and then don't really do anything. And that ends up being the end of the discussion. Or every country, we're having a Ministerial and then we all show up and then that's a fun thing. And that happens year in year out. And then that's the end of it. So I think that I'll start with just the NGO side, we need to really step up and make sure that we are developing great networks of advocates on the ground so that we can be ready to supply policymakers with good, credible information and direct information about what needs to happen in difficult locations.

Whether that information is about development issues, whether it's the tensions with terrorist groups or the government, the military. Whether it's the very particular legal challenges of a specific legal system. At ADF International, we work with lawyers throughout the world and we're actively working on building out that lawyer network of religious freedom advocates. And we want to know what are the challenges that your specific legal system has when you challenge these religious freedom violations. So I think crafting that on the NGO side is important, and making sure that we build that groundswell of networks. Greg, I'm sure he's going to talk about the IRF roundtables, which are a fantastic thing. The U.S. is starting this IRF Alliance to bring over two dozen countries into the fold right now. Countries that are dedicated to being real champions of religious freedom all together. I think that's great, and we have to make sure all those networks are tied together.

Going forward, I think we have some very good laws, some tough laws. We want to make sure those get enforced and we want to make sure that when they aren't being enforced or when they seem to be just symbolic or dead letters then let's start thinking about what are legislative ways to make sure that those things are enforced without removing that reasonable and necessary discretion that the executive has to have. There's always this balance, and I think we're learning that as we go along now that sanctions are getting used a little bit more and other countries are starting to jump in, okay, what can we learn from that to really craft good legislation going forward? What's the discretion that's necessary and what's the stuff that we need to be the letter of the law? And so I think that's something, especially next year and going forward, to really think what are the legislative mechanisms to institutionalize international religious freedom. We're building these institutions; we're building these networks. Let's get it all in. And then let's build from there.

Nathan Wineinger: This was mentioned a bit earlier by my colleagues at IDC, but going forward I think it's absolutely crucial to figure out how to incorporate and integrate IRF into the multifaceted structure of policy like the Global Fragilities Act. The Global Fragilities Act was a piece of legislation

that I know mainline NGOs worked on. IRF is not a major focus of those NGOs, but they're very amenable to it if it's framed correctly. Those NGOs have responded well to IRF partially because IRF advocates show up on these issues with good arguments and good ideas and good evidence. They show up relatively in non-tribal ways, which is very important.

Those IRF advocates have segmented their audiences so that they're able to share with the mainline NGOs the components of IRF that are relevant to the work that they do in the communities that they care for. And so I think that figuring out ways of integrating that is just crucial. I know from a significant person who worked on the Elie Wiesel Act that the people that were the main champions of that thought that it probably wouldn't have been possible for that to pass without the IRF sector engaging on the issue. And so it's, we have a vital role to play and we should play it and we should play it well and we should play it humbly and boldly at the same time, which is a challenge.

As we go forward and striving not to lose momentum, we need to recognize that different administrations have different agendas. It's entirely possible that if President Trump is reelected that there will be a different set of policy agendas that are coming through. And so we need to, not only as an NGO sector, not just rely on the good work that Ambassador Brownback and other individuals within the administration have done but continue to figure out new avenues. How do we engage and deploy IRF more effectively? How do we work with the UN's Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief more effectively? I was grateful to hear that RFI is engaging with the UK government on various aspects of these issues so that we're not just dealing with a few champions in USG. And so I think it's important that we recognize that each administration is going to hopefully make this an important issue but that they're going to make it an important issue in their own way. And we need to be able to respond to that to empower where it's good, to shepherd it into a slightly different direction where it's not good. And that will be the case, whether it's the Trump administration or a Democratic administration.

Peter Burns: I want to actually piggyback on a couple of Nathan's comments because I think you hit on some really important aspects. I think there is a huge push to pass legislation and that legislation sets up the potential for real change to happen. There are three pieces of legislation that are coming to mind. But, when you pass legislation, usually a lot of people have the party after the President signs it and you say "we did it, yay us." The reality is that you also have to engage in implementation because there almost needs as much work to on the other side of the actual signing as it does on the legislation, which is a daunting thing to even say because it takes so much work to get something through Congress. So, you see real change that is really deep rooted.

And then there's this conversation about institutionalizing some of this new moment of focus on international religious freedom. And I think a telling example is the case of the Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief Act which, with huge amount of effort and multiple years of pushing it through Congress, got passed. Maybe the long-term institutional effect is not just the aid to Iraq, it's that it was the motivating and underpinning sort of force that we're starting to see US aid waking up

maybe to this idea of direct aid to religious minority communities and that is that policy shift, that internal shift I think is the institutionalization, if you will, where it's not so much that we're institutionalizing aid to Iraqi Christian or Iraqi Yazidi communities. There's this internal shift in how to do aid, how to work with smaller NGOs, how to work with smaller faith-based groups on the ground. So thinking about in that way and so there're big opportunities with the implementation of the Elie Wiesel Act and the implementation of the Global Fragility Act to look for what are those long-term institutional level.

They may not bubble up in specific things on the surfaces but actually in the gears of places like State Department and the IRF Ambassador's office, right? It has become an office that is critical, that is a major player within State Department, which I think is an institutional change trying to look to how we ensure a place for religious freedom in not just the next administration but the next five administrations going forward.

That is a critical player and it's never going to be cabinet level. It must remain a critical office that's seen as a significant position within the U.S. government so that whether you're a Democrat or a Republican, you're looking for a high profile individual to fill that role. It's not a one and done situation where we had one good ambassador in the position and it will go back to being a think tank philosopher with no external push.

Not that there's anything wrong with being a think tank philosopher—they give us lots of good ideas. But that role should be more active. Another thing is GMA sanctions, GMA sanctions beginning to be focused on or having an aspect that allows for humanitarian or religious freedom related questions is another thing that's happened and it's happened already. But that remains a part of the GMA-like a constellation, if you will, of things that it focuses on and that's not again the sort of a thing that a moment that happened and was great and we got some good sanctions but it fades.

But that remains. And then the other one regards USCIRF and its more creative face. I think there are a few commissioners who are very creative right now and who are taking and doing new things with USCIRF that are effective, meaningful, and that are gaining attention and so that's another place where I think the institutionalization is occurring.

Benjamin Harbaugh: In my recent article for the ICC Fellows program, I point out institutionalization as one of the key areas where the Trump Administration has boosted IRF. I think that trend needs to continue. Peter mentioned a Cabinet level position for IRF. I think that is a big lift as it stands now, but the right direction to move in. The recent announcement of the NSC religious freedom position being filled is a great example of how future administrations could continue to institutionalize IRF and give it the influence that it deserves.

I think another clear policy could be increased religious literacy programs for civil servants and diplomats. Many articles have been written about how the diplomatic core is just waking up to the realities of IRF in their field. I think with the current momentum in this country and abroad, a

more robust training should be required, especially for diplomats. The new British Prime Minister's Envoy for Freedom of Religion and Belief, MP Rehman Chishti, said basically the same thing at the IRF Roundtable a few weeks ago. He announced that a more thorough religious training program was going to be implemented for the U.K.'s FCO. The U.S. should at least follow in their footsteps and develop religious literacy standards that every diplomat has to meet.

Additionally, as Nathan mentioned, we need to address secular humanists more effectively. While the European Freedom of Religion or Belief terminology is wordier, I think that the US should use that language or something that clearly articulates the defense of nonbelief. When I post IRF articles or thoughts online, I have friends that are agnostic or atheistic and have asked if they will be protected from religion. I think the question is legitimate when all they hear is that the Trump Administration protects Christians. That is a misrepresentation of the work being done now, but I think that it has further reach than we'd like to admit. Future administrations should tailor messaging so that it more clearly speaks to nonbelief demographics and encourages them to see why they should support IRF goals.

Jeremy Barker: Let's summarize a few things. That we are talking about the relevance of religion and foreign affairs and increased engagement is a good thing. Something that I have been thinking about a lot recently is oftentimes as that's been bubbling up, it's people making this connection between religion and violence. There are multiple responses to that. One is to say, well, look at atheism and violence, and that's even worse. But part of that, and I think our argument is often we see the issue is the connection between religious restrictions and violence. I was going to include this in testimony earlier this week and cut it out, but Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said, "wars are won by weapons, but peace is won by ideas." I would say religious freedom is a necessary idea for it to win the peace and global religious persecution. So what does that take?

I think we've talked about this, but reframing the issue to engage a far broader constituency in civil society in this effort. There's work to do on the Right and the Left. As a Middle Eastern Christian talking about this said just recently, that often when people talk about persecution of our communities, it's either racist people on the Right that they feel a little bit better cause they're talking about non-Western people, but they're really just using it as a cover for racism on one side or it's progressives who want to use "Islamaphobes" for the 5000th time in the article against conservative religious people. Those are the only people talking about our issue. When there are real things to be done. Neither of those approaches are helpful. So reframing this issue in ways that bring a much broader constituency to it. That includes the media, how they talk about this, not framing this is as if talking about people baking in the sun and shipping containers because of their religious identity is simply a play to voters in rural Tennessee or Iowa. That's insanity to say. To frame it in that way. It is a very dehumanizing way to approach this issue.

It's just insane but there are issues on both sides. Reframing that, thinking about how we as organizations, how we advocate about these issues, on not minimizing the brutality, but not feeding into either one of these concerning, unhelpful narratives. Then for the US government, as

we've talked about, it has to be an all-of-government effort, elevated as a foreign policy priority that informs our diplomatic engagement, our defense and security decisions, our foreign assistance programming. Our good governance programs, even our education funding, our cultural affairs, public diplomacy, all of that. We spend tens of millions on IRF issues. The amount we spent on cultural diplomacy, bringing groups over and those types of exchange programs. Is this issue a part of it? There are hundreds of millions in that programming that ought to more effectively address international religious freedom issues. So until that happens, I think this effort will be often something with isolated acts of compassion and heroism but insufficient to address the full scope of the challenge.

Matias Perttula: Your cultural diplomacy point bleeds into something that I've always thought about—a lot of persecution is a mindset issue and "respecting the otherness of others" …I'm quoting from Mr. Mike Ghouse from Center for Pluralism. I think cultural diplomacy depends on the idea of respecting one another for who we are and respecting others for their own uniqueness, religiously or otherwise.

Nathan Wineinger: But still accepting the fact that we disagree and thinking that we might disagree on very fundamental issues that are the most important in our lives and *then* still accepting that others living out their beliefs is something that we can live with and live with well.

Matias Perttula: And I think that, with cultural diplomacy, educating one another, creating trust, breaking down barriers between not just different nationalities but different religious groups in an international context, is a great way forward. Immediately, something that came to mind was the Fulbright program. All these exchange programs are great initiatives for capturing the issue of pluralism within the upcoming younger generations, developing a knit and then encouraging educational systems and countries to be tolerant and loving. We all know that there's a massive amount of extremist literature and educational material that gets bled out in most of these regions that we work in. But eradicating that extreme content, at whatever levels of the education system, that's the key. And understanding that having a different religious perspective doesn't demean the other by any means whatsoever.

Jeff King: I just want to say thank you everybody, I want to thank you all. Matias is a tireless force on this issue. Our team is. I know we've talked a lot about and we care deeply about the issue just like you guys do and what we're trying to is advance the issue by lifting up other voices. So, if you have any ideas or conditions to this or ways to push the issue forward by what we're doing, we're all ears. But thanks for being involved. Thanks for the work you do. It's really incredible.